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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["I WILL NOT LEAVE THIS ROOM," CRIED RONALD, "TILL YOU HAVE ANSWERED ME. DO YOU LOVE THIS MAN?"]

NAMELESS.

CHAPTER IX.

It is probable that Daisy and Pansy would have missed Mr. Darby's frequent companionship much more, and that their enquiries to their governess would have been still more perplexing than was the case, but that the very day after the rector's proposal tidings came from Lady Dacres that she was returning in a week's time, and that the Castle would be filled with guests.

The children were wonderfully elated, though terribly afraid of their stepmother; they had a real, childish love of gaiety, and the thought of the company and an expedition to Monmouth, to provide them with clothes for the festive occasion, absorbed all their thoughts.

Lilian did not share their delight. Could she have chosen she would have continued that peaceful, dreamy life much longer, for although by nature free from superstitious fancies, she had a nameless dread of Lady Dacres,

which absence had strengthened instead of weakened.

She had never forgotten that episode of Guy Ainslie's letter; and an awful terror had fixed itself on her that the words Lady Dacres spoke concerning his engagement had a very different meaning from the one she had then applied to them.

It was impossible that Guy Ainslie had been engaged twice, therefore Lady Dacres meant that she herself was separated from him by an obstacle. Oh! horror. She had added she hoped the obstacle would be removed.

Could it be that after selling herself for gold she could actually look forward to her husband's death as restoring her to her old lover?

Two people had warned Lilian against my lady on two different occasions. Both must have been sincere.

The man who had loved her could not have accused her falsely, and Archibald Darby was of too chivalrous a nature to wrong any woman.

The double warning rang unpleasantly in poor Lilian's ears, and she dreaded, with all

her heart, the return to the Castle of its mistress.

After all, her fears seemed groundless. Lady Dacres came into the school-room, looking more beautiful than ever, and Lilian saw at once that she was brighter and happier than she had been when she went away.

She kissed her step-children, and shook hands with their governess.

"You look flourishing, Miss Green! Well?"

The "well" was so determined that poor Lilian blushed.

"Am I to congratulate you?"

"Please not!"

"You don't mean to say it isn't settled yet? Why he seemed in such a hurry!"

Pansy and her sister had escaped. They never cared to linger long with their step-mother, naturally, perhaps.

"It will never be settled as you mean," said Lilian, gently. "Please do not speak of it!"

"You mean you have refused him?"

"I did not say so, my lady!"

"Well, you are a very foolish girl, and you have made me tell fearful untruths!"

"I?"

"You! Of course, when I went to see the Ainslies, Kate was loud in her inquiries after you. Wanted to know if I didn't find you a treasure. Of course I told her you were a treasure, of which the Rector would very soon deprive me!"

"Oh, Lady Dacres!"

"Don't you want to hear what she said?"

"If you please! If it isn't a secret!"

"She said you were much too young to go through the world alone, and that she was very glad you would have someone to protect you!"

"She is very kind!"

"Kate is always kind," and my lady gave a strange, heavy sigh, "and her advice is very good if one can only follow it!"

"It must have been pleasant for you to see Leekham again."

"Why?" very abruptly. "Who told you I liked it?"

"You told me yourself it was your old home!"

"It doesn't do to revisit old haunts, Miss Green!" said my lady, and her voice was full of quiet sadness. "I slept one night at Leekham while Sir John was in Scotland, and I declare to you I cried myself to sleep!"

She hurried out of the room then, as though half ashamed of her confession, and Lillian was still wondering at it, when another visitor honoured the school-room—no less a person than Sir John—who came in with a little girl clinging to each hand.

It dawned on the governess then that he did love his children dearly, only fear of vexing his idolised wife prevented him from openly showing his affection.

"Well, Miss Green," he said, pleasantly, "and how have you been getting on? What kind of summer have you spent?"

Lillian answered simply that it had been very pleasant, and then the baronet took her hand, and pressed it with unusual warmth.

"You must not think me ungrateful, my dear young lady," he said, gravely. "I can never thank you enough for the care of my poor little girls; they look like different creatures, so happy and well behaved. I hope you don't find them very troublesome?"

"I am very fond of children, Sir John; I never find it troublesome to have them with me!"

"Ah!" and he was silent for a minute. "Well, I told Mr. Ainslie we owed his sister a great deal for sending you here. I wish my wife liked children."

A little silence, and then, with a courtly grace which told of his long descent, he begged Lillian's acceptance of a present, a simple spray of ivy in filigree silver, more tasteful than valuable, and yet which showed she had not been forgotten.

"From the children, you know," said the baronet, kindly. "I hope I shall see you in the drawing-room sometimes, Miss Green; as a friend of my wife's cousin you will always be welcome."

Lillian explained that she could hardly claim the friendship of Mr. and Miss Ainslie; they had been very kind to her, that was all.

"They're kind to everyone, I think," said Sir John, gravely. "I always detested the sound of Guy Ainslie's name until I saw him, and since that I've felt he was a man I should be proud to call my friend. I've asked him down next month, and I hope he'll come."

Exit the baronet and enter my lady's maid, with a message that she should expect to find Miss Green and the children in the drawing-room when the ladies came up from dinner.

Poor Lillian, it was a trial to her when, dressed in her plain black cashmere, she followed her white frocked pupils downstairs. She need not have feared being noticed; for none of the ladies present deemed it their duty to address the governess. Lillian would be quite free to use her eyes and ears, and the first thing that struck her was the peculiar plainness of the guests. Could Lady Dacres have selected her visitors on purpose that they

might serve as foils to her own brilliant bewitching beauty? For a moment this idea crossed Lillian's mind; then she grew pale as death. She felt as though she was suddenly sinking through the ground. The Dacres' drawing-room faded from her view, and in fancy she saw herself again at Earlsmere listening to a man's impassioned love story.

And what had wrought this change? Simply that the door had opened to admit the gentlemen, and that among Sir John's honoured guests Lillian recognised the man who had wooed her in the days of her prosperity—Sir Ronald Trevlyn, Baronet, of Trevlyn Court.

CHAPTER X.

To go back for a brief space to that short autumn day when Lillian Earl took her fate into her own hands; when, standing by the water's edge, Captain Beaumont and Mr. Martin, clever, shrewd men of the world though they were, could come to no other conclusion than that Lord Earl's adopted child, for whom there seemed no home on earth, had caught one in the clear, sparkling water.

Angry with themselves for being sight of her—angry with the strange mystery which hung over her history—both men yet were still more incensed against Sir Ronald Trevlyn.

"Had he kept true to her," growled the Captain, "this would never have happened! She was no coward; no poverty, no grief for her father's death, would have driven her to such a deed. Sir Ronald is as much her murderer as though he had put a bullet through her heart; only unfortunately, as our law stands, no punishment can befall him. The scorn of all true men, the contempt of good women will be his reward. I shouldn't care to show my face in public if I were Sir Ronald, when this story is noised abroad."

Telegraphing to his wife not to expect him until the next day, Mr. Martin accompanied the Captain to Trevlyn Court, and demanded to speak with his master.

Sir Ronald made no demur about admitting them. If Lillian were going to yield to his wishes, and consent to elope with him, it was just as well he should present a bold front to her temporary guardians—it would throw their suspicions off the scent.

He descended to the library to meet his visitors; they both stood facing the door, and neither of them noticed the baronet's extended hand, or heeded his entreaty to be seated. There they stood with grave, stern dignity, as though they hated the duty which brought them there, and were yet constrained to discharge it.

"Sir Ronald Trevlyn," began Mr. Martin, as his friend signed to him to tell the story, "I have come here with Captain Beaumont to acquaint you with the news of your betrothed's death."

Sir Ronald started.

"Are you jesting?"

"We should not jest on such a subject," said the Captain. "My dear cousin's adopted child—the girl you promised to protect while you lived—has taken her own life, driven to it by the neglect of all truth and honour shown by yourself."

"You speak harshly," Sir Ronald said, "I do not stop to measure my words. This morning she was in the pride of youth and beauty—to-night she is dead and cold, the shadow of a sin resting on her name; but Sir Ronald Trevlyn, in Heaven's sight, and before the Great Judge of all, that sin is yours, not hers. Lillian's death lies at your door, you will have to answer to Lord Earl at the last day for his darling's fate."

He never waited for his answer, but turned on his heel and left the room, followed closely by his friend. Before Sir Ronald had recovered from the shock of the accusation sufficiently to resent it, he was alone!

Alone! Alone with the memory of a girl's

fair face and lustrous, dark blue eyes to haunt him. Alone with the guilt of murder, as they told him, on his soul!

Search was made in every direction—the river was dragged to find the remains of the lost girl, but they were never recovered.

The current was too fast for this to excite wonder; and the whole village shared the opinion of Mr. Martin and the Captain, that Lillian Earl had met her death in those treacherous waters. And from many an honest voice there rose a curse upon Sir Ronald Trevlyn.

For two months Sir Ronald lingered at the Court, bearing the odium which had fallen on him as best he could, believing that in time the memory of Lillian's fate and his share in it would be forgotten.

Then his mother died almost suddenly, and the last tie which bound him to the place was gone.

For her sake he had held to Trevlyn with the frantic eagerness of a drowning man who catches at a straw.

When she was dead he ceased to struggle with fate.

The Court was sold for a good round sum, the mortgages paid off, and a new wealthy owner prepared to live in the house once destined for Lillian; while the baronet, with what remained to him of the purchase-money after his debts were paid, came up to London, hoping that the stain which rested on his honour and made him a banned man in his own county was unknown to the denizens of Belgrave and Mayfair.

He was right. There were few wealthy people near his home, and the hatred of the poor does not travel to London and impress the upper ten thousand against its object.

Sir Ronald found himself very favourably received.

Young and handsome, the last of a grand old family, society opened wide its arms to the fascinating baronet.

Of course he was a bad match, but then he was an ornament to any ball-room; and he made himself very agreeable, so that hostesses voted him an acquisition.

He always seemed to have plenty of money; he had paid all his debts; he could hardly be quite so badly off as people said.

Sir Ronald haunted ball-rooms and operas. He never refused an invitation to a dance.

He was playing a desperate game—his money would not keep him much more than a year.

Before that was gone he must contrive to find a wealthy wife—an heiress who would be glad to change her plebeian gold for the grand old name of Trevlyn.

But though he was popular enough, Sir Ronald found a great deal of trouble in deciding which young lady should have the honour of becoming Lady Trevlyn.

He wanted money; but he was a beauty-lover. He could not have borne to spend his life with a plain woman.

Now heiresses are not always noted for their beauty, and so the season waned, and still the society papers had not chronicled the baronet's engagement.

It was late in May before he became intimate with the Dacres.

Vivian's brilliant, bewitching beauty won his fervent admiration.

Sir John was a useful person to know, and so it came about that Sir Ronald and the Dacres grew on very familiar terms.

In public he was the husband's friend and companion—in private he became Vivian's confident and adviser.

She was new to the world of London life, and he guided her footsteps.

Neither of them dreamed of love. It would have been fatal to his interests, while all the affection of his heart was given elsewhere.

They were simply allies—allies who found time pass pleasantly if spent together, and who were the best of friends because neither of them desired to overstep friendship's barrier.

"Do you know your husband has invited me

to Dacres Castle?" He asked her one afternoon, when he rode beside her carriage in the park.

"Has he? What did you say?"

"I left it open until you had endorsed his invitation. Shall I bore you, Lady Dacres?"

"No, but you will bore yourself."

"Not in your society."

"Don't pay compliments," and her colour deepened. "In plain English, Sir Ronald, my husband's castle is the dearest place I ever saw. We spent the winter there, and it nearly killed me."

"But that was the honeymoon," he said, in a light, bantering tone. "You ought not to have been dead then."

"The honeymoon was over ages before. I shall fill the house with company, Sir Ronald, and you will be very welcome if you come; only I warn you; it will be very dull."

"I am not afraid of that; I shall come."

"Then I will invite Miss Cash."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You ungrateful man! it is entirely for your benefit. I can't endure the fair Sophia myself!"

"Then why inflict her on me?"

"Because rumour has it that she is to be Lady Trevlyn; and it will be a little amusement for me to watch the development of your romance. When one is married and does for one's self match-making is a great resource."

Sir Ronald did not deny the rumour she had alluded to. Vivian looked serious.

"Is it so?" she asked. "Come, Sir Ronald, confide in me, and I will help you to the utmost of my power. You don't know the interest I take in other people's love affairs!"

"I shall never have a love affair. Lady Dacres, do you despise a man because he's poor?"

"No,"—thinking of one man she loved, whom the world called poor, and whom she certainly did not despise—"but I think poverty is very depressing."

"And being poor, being out of pride from trade, what resource is there to me but to marry money?"

"Which means, you contemplate sacrificing yourself at the shrine of the fair Sophia. She has twenty thousand a year, I believe; so you won't be poor if you marry her."

Sir Ronald looked straight into Vivian's dark eyes.

"If cruel fate debar me from marrying for love—if she whom I worship is another's—am I to blame for considering the dictates of prudence?"

Vivian blushed. "Of course, he meant herself. It never offends a woman to be beloved. Lady Dacres might have felt affronted if Sir Ronald had spoken of marrying someone as young and beautiful as herself; but she could not grudge him such consolation as Miss Cash's plain face offered."

"No; you are very rational. Then you will go down with us to the Castle next month, and Miss Cash shall meet you; she's a great favourite with Sir John. I believe he sometimes regrets that I do not resemble her."

Sir Ronald laughed.

"That's quite impossible!"

"Sophia Cash was a young lady of nearly thirty, of large fortune, and thoroughly respectable family. Sir John and her father had been intimate, and the baronet had been her guardian. She was plain to a degree, but she possessed a brave, kindly heart, a generous disposition, and a mild, equable temper. There were many who thought she would have made a better stepmother for Daisy and Pansy than penniless beautiful Vivian Ormond. Perhaps she shared the opinion herself; but all the same, she was on friendly terms with the young bride, and had visited her pretty frequently during the season."

"Of course, you will come to us, Sophia?"

said Sir John, when the invitation was given; "Daisy and Pansy will be delighted to renew their acquaintances with you."

"And so will someone else," said his wife, smiling. "Miss Cash, do you know Sir Ronald

Trevlyn is coming to us on purpose to meet you?"

"I am glad he will be there," said the lady, complacently. "I like Sir Ronald, Lady Dacres."

"And he does something more than like you," whispered her beautiful hostess. "Oh! Miss Cash, do take pity on our dullness, and settle the affair at the Castle. It would be a charming place for a wedding! We have a beautiful church, the handsomest rector for miles round; and I will lend you Daisy and Pansy as bridesmaids."

Well, no more was said upon the subject, but Sir Ronald accompanied Sir John and Lady Dacres to the Castle; and it was quite settled that Miss Cash would join the party in a day or two.

The arrangement was a relief to Ronald Trevlyn in the present state of his finances. A month's hospitality at such a home as Dacres Castle was not to be despised. And then Sir John was a generous, liberal host; my lady had the art of entertaining at her fingers' ends; and the woman he had made up his mind to wed would be in the same house, ready for him to expend all his eloquence on the wooing. He was a long time dressing for dinner, and his thoughts wandered from the present wooing to one that had been brief and hapless, and which had begun and ended only a few months before. He had never sorrowed for Lillian Earl as Guy Ainslie had grieved over the loss of Vivian, but, in his way, he had missed her. He had never quite forgiven her for escaping him—for preferring an early self-sought grave to life at his side. He knew in his heart that he had never really meant, after Captain Beaumont's tidings, to marry Lillian. The elopement once agreed to he would have known how to arrange a ceremony which while it seemed to the trusting girl a private marriage would yet not make her his wife, but leave him free to bestow that title upon an heiress.

He never meant to have made Lillian Lady Trevlyn; but he meant to have been kind to her, and to have loved her always as much as it was in his nature to love anyone. He had felt sure of her consent, and lo! she had escaped him, choosing a means of escape which left a lasting blight upon his name in the minds of all who knew the story.

She was dead! Her short life had ended months before. At most he had known her only a few weeks, and yet—how her face haunted him!—yet she had been dearer to him than any woman.

"I wonder who she was," he thought, as he arranged his white tie before the glass. "Her grace and beauty were beyond anything I have seen this season. She was nameless and obscure, and yet had she been presented at Court all London would have raved about her. Poor child! she must have cared for me, to take her own life just because she could not belong to me before all the world. I suppose it is better for me as it is. Such an entanglement might have hindered my wedding; and marriage is an unfortunate necessity."

He went downstairs to dinner. He was the life and soul of that gay party, and yet all the while a girl's fair face haunted him; he seemed to see two dark blue eyes, and hear a sweet voice asking him whether his love would last for ever.

Alas! alas! it was barely a year ago, and already that love was cold and dead. Already he was wishing to give his name to another woman.

Sir Ronald wondered a little that his hostess had not arranged for Miss Cash to arrive with him. His destined bride being absent, he did not hurry to the drawing-room, but entered it with a stream of other men in time for coffee. His eyes wandered round the room as he sought Lady Dacres. They soon discovered her on a sofa, and then they caught sight of another face, younger, and as fair as hers, and for one moment Sir Ronald deemed his eyes were playing him false.

Was it—could it be? Were there two girls with that bright, ethereal beauty, those dark,

expressive eyes? Was this only some perplexing resemblance to Lillian? or was it the real Lillian herself, and had that story of her death been a malicious fabrication?

Sir Ronald took a seat where he could command a full view of the young lady, and set himself to unravel the problem. If this were indeed Lillian—if she had deceived him and let him hear the reproach of driving her to destruction unjustly—he would never forgive her; he would grudge no time, spare no effort to ruin the girl who had dared to escape his cruel plans. If this were Lillian, then, indeed he, Ronald, was her sworn foe.

But he was sure it could not be. Mr. Martin and Captain Beaumont were men of honour; they would not have come to him with a trumped-up story. Besides, the emotion in their voices, the anger with which they spoke, all proved that they, at least, were convinced of the reality of Lillian's death.

An inquiry of his host for the children was Sir Ronald's first step. The father, delighted at the introduction, led up the little girls, and the guest did his best to make friends with them. He was not used to children, but the little Dacres were very simple and intelligent; they responded to his advances with frank cordiality; promised to show him the park and to take him round the picture-gallery. Pansy even included an invitation to the schoolroom to see her white kitten.

"And how is it I never saw you in London?" asked Sir Ronald, when he found an opportunity.

"Oh! we stayed at home."

"All alone? Poor little maids!"

"Oh! it was very nice. No, we weren't alone; Miss Green took care of us."

"She is your governess?"

"Yes! Isn't she pretty?"

"How can I tell!"

"Why, you've seen her?"

"No!"

"She's over there, in a black dress; she always wears black because her papa died last year."

"Poor thing!"

"She isn't poor," protested Daisy; "she is very happy, she said so the other day."

"And you like her?"

"To be sure. You see, we did have such a dreadful time before she came—and we expected someone old and horrid."

"Miss Green certainly is not old."

"No; nor horrid. I'm sure I shall never forget when she came last winter; things were so black and she made them all so bright!"

"Daisy, you are disturbing Sir Ronald. Of course the interruption came from Lady Dacres. Daisy and her sister looked scared. "Go back to Miss Green directly," ordered the stepmother, "and tell her I think it is time for you to leave the drawing-room."

"May I congratulate you?" whispered Sir Ronald, mischievously, when the children were out of earshot.

"What on?"

"Your children—they are charming little maids."

"I hate children, they don't trouble me much. Fortunately, they have a rare aversion of a governess, who never wants any holidays."

"What an obliging person!"

"She is peculiar altogether. She is quite alone in the world, and as poor as a church mouse, and yet she refused a most eligible offer the other day. I spoke to her about it, of course, and she had the impertinence to tell me it was her own affair!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE days that followed were full of care and perplexity for Lillian. She could not tell whether Sir Ronald recognized her.

The children had duly presented her to him when he chanced to meet them in one of their rambles, and he had shaken hands with her in a perfectly composed manner. He addressed her as a stranger; only once or twice he made an almost imperceptible pause in speaking her

name, as though it had quite escaped him, or were a matter of doubt. He declared he had lost his way, and attached himself to the schoolroom party to be escorted back to the Castle quite as a matter of course, although Lillian showed pretty plainly he was unwelcome.

"You will show me the way, won't you?" he said, pleadingly to the little girls. "Miss Green,"—to Lillian—"you won't enjoy your own luncheon if you think of me wandering aimlessly about without any."

He talked chiefly to the children during the walk, but as they were nearing the house he suddenly asked Lillian,—

"Where you ever in Blankshire, Miss Green?"

"I have been very little in England," she returned. "I think I know no county really well except Monmouthshire."

He looked at her steadily.

"Did my question offend you?"

"Not at all. Why do you ask?"

"Because, pardon me, you did not answer it," and then he devoted his attention to the children, leaving the governess to digest his words.

It was not a pleasant prospect they had conjured up.

If he, indeed, recognized her, it was in his power to tell her whole history to Lady Daeres; and Lillian realized sadly that things would look very black against her. An impostor, a pretended suicide! Sir Ronald might describe her by all these names, if it seemed good to him.

Miss Cash's arrival created a diversion. From childhood she had visited at the Castle, and the little girls knew her well. She managed to spare time to come pretty often to the schoolroom, and she was very kind to the beautiful, fair young governess.

"You look fagged to death!" she said, coming in late one evening, on her way to her own room. "Miss Green, I shall tell Lady Daeres that you are overworked, and need a holiday."

"Please, don't," said Lillian, piteously.

"Oh, Miss Cash, promise me you won't!"

"Of course I won't, if you ask me not; but, seriously, you look quite ill!"

"I am a little tired."

"Children troublesome?"

"Oh, no!"

"Private troubles, eh? Or are you suffering from the English complaint called homesickness? Come, tell me!"

"I could not suffer from that, Miss Cash."

"Why not?"

"I have no home to long for!"

"No home at your age! Why you look a perfect child!"

"I am nineteen!"

"And you really have no home?"

"So really, that if Lady Daeres insisted on my taking a holiday, I should only go into lonely lodgings! I am happier with the children, Miss Cash, than alone in London!"

"But haven't you any relations?" asked the heiress, bluntly.

"Not one in the world!"

Sophia was touched. She bent over the bowed head and kissed the fair, white brow.

"You are like me. I have neither kith nor kin. But, Miss Green, there is a relationship nearer than father or mother, brother or sister, and I hope you may choose to fill it to some good man. I have heard that the decision rests with you."

Lillian blushed.

The heiress continued,—

"When one is alone in the world, marriage is a terrible temptation. Miss Green, won't you congratulate me on yielding to it?"

The girl smiled. No thought of the truth came to her.

"Are you going to be married? I hope you will be very happy, I am sure, Miss Cash."

"And you don't ask me whom I am going to make happy. Come, guess!"

"I know so few people," said Lillian, apologetically. "I really can form no idea."

"Well, it is no secret, though it was only settled this afternoon. Everyone knows all about it; and Lady Daeres is busy planning my wedding. As I used to be a kind of ward of Sir John's, she is good enough to wish me to be married from the Castle."

A faint dread seized Lillian; not for herself. All love for Ronald Trevlyn had died out of her heart long ago, but she was full of pity for the generous woman before her. What would her life be like linked to Ronald's?

"You have not told me the name," she said, hoping against hope she was mistaken.

"I am to be Lady Trevlyn!"

Lillian turned so white that a momentary suspicion crossed Miss Cash that her lover had been flirting with Lady Daeres' pretty governess.

"What is the matter?" she asked, sharply.

"Nothing, except a pain in my side. I often have it at night when I am over tired."

"Indigestion!"

"Very likely. Shall you live at Trevlyn Court when you are married, Miss Cash?"

"Oh dear, no; the Court has been sold months ago. Sir Ronald is about as poor as a church mouse; but then, you see, I am very rich, so we shall get on pretty comfortably!"

"I hope you will be happy."

"I hope so. They say marriage is a lottery; but I don't think either of us are romantic, and we are old enough to know our own minds," then, quite forgetting the suspicion which had troubled her, she kissed the governess affectionately, and bade her good-night.

"She will be his wife," thought Lillian.

"Lady Trevlyn; rich, courted, honoured; but, oh, I pity her! I would rather be as I am, nameless, poor, and obscure, than be Lady Trevlyn, for he will break her heart! He pretended to love me; he tried to lure me to my ruin. He is hard and cold; there is no pity in his nature!"

She spoke the words half aloud in her agony; a struggle was going on in her heart. Miss Cash had shown her many a little kindness; she of all the party at the Castle had been the only one to remember that the governess was young and gently reared, with tastes and feelings like their own.

Heiress though she was, she had found time to spend many a half-hour in the schoolroom, and to do much to brighten Lillian's life; and now the girl heard she was to be married to a man utterly unworthy of her—who would embitter her whole future!

No wonder she longed to go boldly to Miss Cash and warn her of the character of her betrothed—no wonder that in her emotion she spoke her opinion of him aloud!

"A very pretty sentiment!" said a mocking voice in her ear. "Pray were you imparting your opinion of me to my fiancée? I see that she has just left you."

Sir Ronald was at her elbow. He had entered, unperceived, in time to hear her last words.

There was a look of bitter anger upon his handsome face. He was not in a passion; his displeasure was that cold, determined rage, which is more vindictive than the fiercest invectives.

"I did not impart my sentiments to Miss Cash," returned Lillian, proudly.

"But you mean to?"

She was silent. In very truth she had been deliberating that question within herself.

"It matters little," said Sir Ronald, mockingly. "I am a gentleman and a baronet. My whole life is open for her inspection. Do you think she would believe accusations launched at me by a nameless impostor?"

All doubt was solved then. He had recognized her; he knew she was his sometime betrothed—the girl men had once called Lillian Earl!

Was he thinking of the days when she had been his own, when it had been his right to take what kisses he pleased from those full, arched lips?

Was he contrasting her girlish grace, her

fair ethereal loveliness, with the robust form and plain face of his heiress-fiancée?

"The farce had better end now!" he said, roughly. "You are the girl Lord Earl tried to palm off upon society as his daughter. Your name may be Green; I can't exactly prove that it is not, but I know enough of your past history to make Lady Daeres consider you an unfit inmate of the Castle. You are in my power, Lillian. Do you hear? In my power for all time!"

She looked at him, and her heart sank. As well ask pity of the nether millstone as seek it at his hands!

One wild longing came to her that Guy Ainslie was at her side, one vain regret that Archibald Darby, who loved her so truly and so well, was not there to cope with her enemy; then she summoned her courage and turned to him.

"I have never injured you, Sir Ronald—never once. Why should you seek to blight my life?"

"You were mine!" he said, passionately; "you were mine, and you escaped me!"

"Say, rather, that when I lost name and fortune I lost your love, too," she corrected him. "Love do I call it! It can never have deserved that name, or you would not threaten me!"

"It was love!" said Ronald, fiercely; "such love as I have never felt for any other creature. If you had been Miss Earl—if you had married me—I should have been a different man!"

The words were wrung from him in his anguish. The veins stood out upon his forehead like thick purple cords.

Lillian realized dimly that he had loved her—loved her as much as men like him can do.

"I would have married you," she said, faintly. "The rupture of our engagement came from yourself, Sir Ronald."

"You would have married me, but you demanded a grand public wedding, a luxurious bridal! You would not be content with love; you could not trust me!"

She sighed. She had been very near trusting him; but she had never regretted not doing so, not even during those dreary weeks in London. Since she had seen him again she regretted it still less.

"It was best for you," she said, quietly.

"I left you free—free to win a wealthy wife, as I hear you have done."

"You left me to bear the burden of your lies!"

"What do you mean?"

"It was highly melodramatic, no doubt, to commit suicide," he said, with a sneer; "and that high-flown captain and the fool of a lawyer were quite taken in by it. Of course they laid your sin at my door—came and preached at me for half-an-hour—declared I had driven you to it."

"I never thought of that," she confessed. "Life was very hard to me. I could not live upon their charity. I could not come to you. The only thing I thought of was to disappear!"

"Ay, without thinking who was to bear the odium of it! That's just like a woman—selfish to the core!"

"But it has not hurt you!" she persisted.

"It has made me an alien from my birth-place. The idiots round Trevlyn chose to look upon me as your murderer. As soon as my mother died I sold the Court."

He did not tell her that his difficulties necessitated this step even more than his unpopularity, but such was the case.

"I am very sorry," said Lillian, gravely. "All I wanted was to go away, and be no trouble to anyone. I never thought of bringing annoyance on you."

"And you have done well for yourself. I stumble on you at the most luxurious house in the county, among the aristocracy."

"Among them, but not of them," quoted Lillian, in a low voice. "Homeless, friendless, the shadow of the past upon me; behind

me a past I may not own; in front nothing but one vast loneliness! My lot has little enviable in it, Sir Ronald!"

"They tell me it is not so—that you have found someone willing to overlook your want of birth. I hear you are to be Mr. Darby's wife!"

The girl raised her dark blue eyes to his face, but she spoke no word.

"Tell me," cried Sir Ronald Trevlyn, "is it so? Are you to be Mr. Archibald Darby's wife?"

"What right have you to ask it?"

"The right of loving you," he almost hissed.

"Good Heavens, Lillian! do you think I will stand calmly by, and see you the wife of another man?"

"How could you prevent it?"

"You had better not try me too far. Do you think a word whispered in Lady Dacres' ear will not change the consideration in which you are held? A clergyman can hardly pardon an acted lie, a wilful fraud, and you have been guilty of both."

"I think he would pardon them," remembering the Rector's woeing. "I fancy he is too strong and noble himself not to be ready to forgive one who erred through ignorance."

"And you mean to marry him if he will have you, after he hears the story of your life?"

"I repeat, you have no right to ask such a question. You are Miss Cash's future husband, not mine."

Sir Ronald laid one hand upon her shoulder, his hot breath fell upon her fair cheek as he cried passionately,—

"I will not leave this room until you have answered me, once for all, Lillian—do you love this man?"

"No!"

The answer was wrung from her in her fear; in another instant she repeated it.

Sir Ronald Trevlyn put his arm round her, and kissed her.

"You are mine! Lillian, mine only. You are my first and only love; nothing in the world shall take you from me."

But the girl broke away from him in passionate indignation.

"How dare you!" she cried, "how dare you insult me so?"

"I love you."

"You choose a strange method of showing it. Once more, will you let me go?"

"When you have answered one question. I thought I had forgotten you, that the memory of the reproach you had cast on me had banished you from my heart. I find it is not so; the witchery of your beauty still enthralled me. Lillian, I must be your dearest love, or your most bitter foe! Speak, say but one word. Which is it to be?"

And in the stillness of that midnight hour, in perfect silence, he waited for her answer. He felt pretty sure what it would be.

(To be continued.)

Don't COMPLAIN.—Don't complain of your birth, your training, your employment, your hardships; never fancy you could be something if you only had a different lot and sphere assigned to you. God understands his own plans, and knows what you want a great deal better than you do. The very things that you most deprecate as fatal limitations and obstructions are probably what you most want. What you call hindrances and discouragements are probably God's opportunities, and it is nothing new that the patient should dislike his medicines, or any certain proofs that they are poisons. No! a trace to all such impatience. Choke that devilish envy which gnaws at your heart because you are not in the same lot with others; bring down your soul, or rather bring it up to receive God's will, and do his work, in your lot, in your sphere, under your cloud of obscurity against your temptations; and then you shall find that your condition is never opposed to your own good, but really consistent with it.

HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CYRIL returned to the dining-room, with such a grim expression of countenance that Lady Somerville looked at him in surprise.

"She wouldn't drink it?"

He shook his head.

"I didn't ask her. I tapped at the door and got no answer."

"I daresay she was asleep. She seemed quite exhausted. I shall go in presently and propose to take her to bed."

Vere made no answer, and she thought him strangely unsympathetic, especially when she went on to lament over Godfrey's headache, to which he only responded with a grunt.

"I never shall forget the fright I had this morning!" she said, with a sigh. "Godfrey is so delicate, that I am always afraid some dreadful thing will happen to him."

"Creaking hinges last the longest."

"Yes; but those who are most prized"—her voice growing soft—"are sure to be taken from us!"

"Ah! but is he prized?" slightly elevating his eyebrows.

"More than I can tell you!" impressively.

"Remember, we have no son, and he takes a son's place."

"I never understand him. He always goes about with a dejected, hang-dog expression, as if he hated everyone and himself as well."

"Dejected! Yes; but 'hang-dog' sounds so very unpleasant," she remonstrated, gently. "Poor fellow; he has been so bitterly tried that no wonder his high spirits were crushed. You can't expect him to be always laughing, when a man has suffered such terrible bereavements."

"About his sister, I never knew whether to sympathize or not," sinking his voice. "Do you think she really died?"

"My dear Mr. Vere, what are you thinking of? Of course she did. Why, where could she have been hidden all this while?"

"He might have hidden her, if he had an object. There are no end of quiet corners where such a thing might be carried out."

"I hope not," with a little shiver. "The idea is too ridiculous. What could have been his object?"

"Spite against Maltravers!"

"But he was his best friend—and, pardon me, it seems quite absurd to discuss it seriously. Is there any girl alive who would allow herself to be hidden away in a corner for the best years of her life?"

"Force might be used, if persuasion failed," with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Yes, if poor Godfrey were a Bluebeard, instead of one of the most amiable men alive. Do you know, that when our poor Lina died we trembled for his reason?"

"I don't wonder," with a kindly smile. "I remember her years ago, at a haymaking party, looking as bright and happy as the day itself. It was hard for anyone to lose her."

"She was always bright, never a cloud on her face. I suppose you came over with the Arkwrights?"

"Yes, I was staying with them." Afraid of pursuing that subject any further in Mr. Mallon's presence he abruptly asked if Lady Somerville did not think the facial paralysis had disappeared most wonderfully?

"It was not facial paralysis exactly," interposed Mr. Mallon, eager not to make himself out a prodigy beyond belief. "It was more like—like—"

"Ah, I understand, I've felt it myself"—a remark which would have nearly destroyed Cyril's gravity, if he had been in a mood to see a joke.

"Dr. Mungrave always tells me it is an aggravated attack of neuralgia, and that the only thing for it is plenty of support. I hope you have been taking champagne. And now I think it is time to see how our other patient is progressing," getting up from her chair, and dropping her handkerchief; which Vere at

once secured, as it would give him an excuse for following her at once, instead of waiting for the others.

He saw Lady Somerville and Meta go into the boudoir, then came in with the handkerchief in his hand.

"I think you dropped this!" he said, on purpose to make them aware of his presence as his quick eye went round the room in search of Somerville. Nella was lying on the sofa, her lashes wet with tears, her face flushed as if with recent agitation, and Cyril thought he understood it all so well as he stooped to pick up something he had trodden on. "Whose is this?" and he held it up.

Lady Somerville looked round, as Meta exclaimed,—

"Godfrey's signet-ring! How on earth did it get here?"

"How very extraordinary!" said her mother "I suppose he dropped it when we were all here before dinner. Nella, my love, you must have something before you go to bed."

"I think Somerville must have taken it off on purpose," said Vere, slowly. "His hand is scarcely so thin that it could tumble off by accident."

The pink deepened in Nella's cheeks.

"What does it matter?" and she raised herself on her elbow. Though he had wronged and insulted her, the infinite pity of a woman's gentle heart made her resolve to defend him, and not portion out her generosity in halves. "Whether pulled off, or dropped, he will certainly want it back again."

"Shall I tell him that you return it?" fixing his eyes on her sternly.

"Certainly not. Give it to Meta."

"Ah, perhaps it was to you he offered it?"

turning to Miss Somerville as he spoke.

"Oh, no," she said, holding out her hand for it. "He values it so much that he would not give it to any one."

"Not if he loved her to distraction?"

"No, he must be further gone than he ever could be," with a little sad smile, "to come to that!"

"Than he ever could be?" with a glance at Nella, who instantly got up feeling weak and dizzy.

"How did you hurt your neck?" asked Lady Somerville, as she kissed her affectionately.

"It was an accident."

"Somerville's words," thought Vere. "They got up the lesson between them. You never told us anything about your expedition," he said, aloud. "Where you met, or how you fared, or where this accident happened. It all seems wrapt in the profoundest mystery."

"Poor thing! how could she tell us?" exclaimed Meta. "She could not talk when she was fainting."

"No, but she could afterwards," remembering how he had seen her in animated conversation with Somerville, clinging to his arm, and letting his eyes dwell with, as he called it, "insolent admiration" on her face.

Nella leant against the table, feeling rather like a hunted animal with those three pair of questioning eyes trying to drag her secret from her.

"I was delayed on the road," she said, slowly; "for a man whom I met, told me there was a gentleman lying ill at the Fox and Hounds, who had been hurt by a fall, and so I went there to see, and found a dissenting minister"—with a slight smile at the contrast they presented to her mind—"instead of Mr. Somerville."

"And where did you find him?"

"After that," her lids dropping on her burning cheeks, for it was hard for her to deceive, "something startled Limerick, my reins broke, my whip was lost, and I never was so frightened in my life."

"Poor child! Meta, dear, take her upstairs. I think, perhaps, a cup of hot coffee would do her more good than anything else," seeing that her teeth actually chattered at the remembrance.

But Vere was inexorable.

"Where did you find Somerville?"

She looked over her shoulder as she went through the door.

"I was tearing along the road at a great pace, when I heard hoofs behind me, and he joined me just outside the gates."

"Then you don't know any more about him than we do?" pursuing her across the hall.

"I don't know why Pearl came home alone," she said, wearily. "At least, I don't remember."

"Don't worry her about it now, Mr. Vere," said Meta, surprised at his persistency. "Godfrey will tell us everything to-morrow."

"Yes," he thought bitterly, as he followed his hostess into the drawing-room—"one big falsehood wrapt in a cover of truth to make it go down."

When Sir Edward and Mr. Mallon came in, Lady Somerville, who had found the conversation unusually difficult to keep alive, departed upstairs to see after her beloved nephew.

She found him lying on a sofa, pale and dishevelled, as if he had run his fingers through his hair on purpose to make it stand on end—with a lamp by his side, and an uncut novel in his hand.

She put her hand on his head, and gently smoothed his hair, inquiring most tenderly after his health.

He answered less abruptly than usual, feeling the value of her affection now that he knew it to be forfeited. In answer to her questions he told her that his head throbbed maddeningly—which was true—and that it was not to be wondered at after his spill in the morning—which certainly implied a falsehood. Pearl had thrown him somewhere not far from Newton; and when he recovered his senses he wandered "all over the place" looking for her, but the brute was nowhere to be seen. Utterly done for, he reached an inn, which he did not know at all—went to bed, and never woke till late in the afternoon. After that he borrowed a horse, and came upon Miss Maynard somewhere along the road, in a deplorable condition, as if Limerick had been down with her.

"You should have sent us word!"

"You can't expect a stunned man to act like one who has all his wits about him. I should like to have seen anyone writing letters after such a spill as I had."

"It was not your fault, of course, but we were so miserably frightened!" the tears coming into her eyes as she thought of Pearl with the empty saddle.

"Glad to hear it," with a smile. "I didn't know anyone cared enough about me to turn a hair."

"Godfrey!" in a pained voice, "when you know that, after our Meta, you are dearer to us than anyone else in the world."

"Only dear as long as you knew nothing against me. If you found out that I had committed the smallest sin in the calendar you would instantly turn your most respectable backs on the sinner."

"I wish you would not talk like that," with a suspicion of a frown on her usually placid brow; "I can't bear to hear you. I know that you are far too honourable and high-principled ever to do anything really disgraceful; and small indiscretions we must all be ready to forgive, as we hope to be forgiven."

"My principles forsook me with my first teeth, and I haven't got one of them left. Not my fault, aunt, so don't shake your head. Place a man that can't swim in water, out of his depth, and he is sure to sink. That was my case."

"But you haven't sunk!" with a fond smile. "At least I can sink no further," his gloomy eyes fixed on the fire. "I've reached the bottom at last."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"I wonder what is the meaning of Somerville's turning up again!" said Vere, thoughtfully, as he tilted his chair back, rested his feet on the stone coping which surrounded the tessellated tiles of the smoking-room fire, and

surveyed the ceiling. "Do you think he found her?"

"No, the odds are against it. He was never a healthy-looking fellow, but he looked positively ghastly when he came in—just the sort of expression you could imagine on a poor devil who was going to jump from London Bridge."

"I wish he had done it!"

"What's the matter, old man? You are not yourself to-night," and Victor looked at him anxiously.

"The matter?—anyone could see it with half an eye. It's a good thing we are off on Wednesday—'pon my word, I couldn't stand it much longer!"

"You've been awfully good to bear it—"

"Nonsense! I didn't mean that," interrupting him, hastily. "Nothing to do with you; but that brute makes me sick. I don't think I shall have any peace of mind till I've given him a thrashing!"

"You couldn't do it under his uncle's roof; and when we are clear of it, I shall be inclined to dispute the privilege."

"What are the plans for to-morrow?"

"I've sent word to Joe Stephens to keep watch to-night—so long as Somerville is here, I consider that we are pretty safe. If possible, I shall slip away early in the morning; but if Sir Edward hooks me, Danvers is to go in my place. Poor little Robin evidently gave them the slip yesterday—stopping to refill his pipe—and Pearl was sent home to throw us off our guard, whilst he was looking for her."

"If you think she isn't found, I had better call in Scotland yard, and put them on the track; but, turning it over every way, I don't think Somerville would have come back. He would have been missing as well as his sister."

"He might be afraid of exciting suspicion. Remember, he does not know that we suspect him."

"He smelt a rat last Thursday. He's sharp enough; but whatever could induce him to settle her down here, where everybody knew him, I can't conceive."

"Although so near, it is out-of-the-way, and it gave him the advantage of being able always to have her under his eye, without exciting remark by long journeys into another county."

"We are talking as if it were proved," said Vere, with a short laugh; "when none of us have seen her."

"It is proved!" said Victor, doggedly,—"not such proof as would hold good in a law court, or justify us in applying for a search-warrant, but quite enough for people of common sense. Only think!" clenching his hand with the bitterness of unavailing regret, "if I had chanced to ride towards Alverley, instead of to Silcoates, I should have seen her as Miss Somerville did, and brought her home here in my arms."

"Very likely you would have missed her. My cousin saw nothing of her."

"But Somerville evidently heard she was there, when he galloped up the road like a madman."

"Confound him! I wish his mare had kicked his brains out," said Vere, savagely.

"Has he been flirting again with Miss Maynard?" with a quiet smile.

"I expect they'll make a match of it," mumbled; "and then he'll break her heart."

"If I were you, I would prevent it."

"Easier said than done. Do you know where he was this evening, when we were safely out of the way at dinner?"

"In his room, taking care of his head."

"In the boudoir, taking care of my cousin."

"By Jove, you don't mean it!" his eyes wide with dismay.

"I saw them with my own eyes, and came away like a shot!"

"I should have done nothing of the kind, but gone straight up to them, asking blandly after his headache. He must have looked foolish, and that would have been something."

"No good. When a girl is in love, she would swear the devil was a saint."

"I said nothing about abusing him. Of

course, if you had tried that dodge, she would have been bound to stand up for him; but you might have gone in, and shown them that your eyes were open."

"And been thought a spy, perhaps, for my pains."

"It doesn't do to be too thin-skinned," sententiously.

"It's easy to talk—"

"But 'deuced hard to do the right thing at the right moment. Let us come to bed!" and jumping up, Mr. Mallon lighted the two candles. "Look here, Vere, you've stood by me through thick and thin, and there's nothing I wouldn't do for you—you know that. Would you like me to give Miss Maynard a hint that Somerville's a scoundrel? She might think me impertinent, but she couldn't say I was jealous."

"Thanks, awfully. It won't do any good; but you might try."

And with this small amount of encouragement Mr. Mallon had to be satisfied.

The next morning, remembering that Cyril was going up to town by the 10.15 train, Nella took care to be down in better time than usual.

In this case, as in many others, virtue had to be content with being its own reward, for Vere in his bearing towards herself was like a porcupine with all his quills standing on end.

She might ask him for butter with an engaging smile, or look quite concerned because Lady Somerville had given him too much cream in his coffee, but nothing softened him.

He regarded her with as stern an air as if he had been a policeman and she an incorrigible pickpocket; and although the conversation turned to the dance at the Arkwrights on Tuesday, he never tried to secure the first waltz, as had been his invariable habit when they went to a ball together.

As breakfast progressed her spirits waxed low, but her pride rose high, and in her eagerness to show that she did not care "the least bit in the world," she almost attempted a flirtation with Mr. Mallon.

Staunch friend as he was to Vere, he felt somewhat inclined to second her efforts, because he thought it was a pity that such good things as a winning smile and a coquettish glance should be thrown away; and, perhaps, if Somerville had been down a little earlier, he might not have resisted the temptation of annoying him.

As usual, however, Godfrey was late, and came in looking white and haggard, just as Cyril got up and begged to be excused, as he must be off.

"Give my love to the old lady!" cried Sir Edward, cheerily; "and tell her that she may leave you her fortune if she likes. I know of a nice little place not far from here, with capital shooting, and just enough land to induce you to ruin yourself in amateur farming. Persuade her to part with a few of her guineas before it gets into the market."

"If she did, the dry rot would get into the house before I ever saw it," he said, slowly.

"I don't think I mentioned it to you, that I was going to start for India next month."

Somerville shot an eager glance across the table at Nella; but she preserved a brave front; and only Mr. Mallon, who was sitting by her side, saw that her hands were clasped so tightly together, that her nails were white.

"Dear me! that is very sudden, isn't it?" she heard Sir Edward say; and then Meta said something she scarcely knew what, and Cyril answered, "Yes, it was only settled last night; I've got the letter in my pocket."

Then she laughed—a little hysterically, and it sounded to herself as if the laugh belonged to someone else, and said, with her eyes fixed on a pat of creamy butter,

"When you come back I suppose you will have married some girl out there, with a parchment skin!"

"Yes, when I come back," was the grave answer.

Then the door shut, and she felt as if the

room were empty, because one man had gone out! As soon as she could move without exciting remark, she got up from the table, and walked out of the room, humming an air from *Carmen*.

In the hall she hesitated, remembering that the housemaids would probably be still in possession of the bedrooms. Hearing a step behind her, she hurried into the library with the speed of a frightened rabbit, knowing that this was the last room in the house where she was likely to be disturbed.

Sir Edward had his own private study, where he transacted any business that happened to turn up, either with regard to his large estate, or his duties as a magistrate; and the rest of the family were decidedly quite the reverse of "booky people." Meta sometimes read a popular novel, but Lady Somerville never studied anything but the *Morning Post* and the Bible. Therefore, Nella felt safe when she had shut the massive mahogany door behind her, and found herself alone, with the well-lined book-shelves and the quaintly-carved furniture.

She did not cry, but stood quite still on the hearth-rug before the glowing fire, her hands clasped together, her tearless eyes fixed on the red coals. Next month he was going; by the month after he would be gone!

Whatever hole she got into by folly or generosity she would have to scramble out of as best she could; for her unfailing helper and friend would no longer be there to stretch out a strong right hand. Only last night, if she had only known it, surely she might have won him over to stay a little longer, or give up the mad project altogether! His manner had been very strange to her; but that seemed always the case now, as if he were bitterly offended with her for obeying Meta's urgent prayer. He could scarcely have seemed more angry with her if he had poured through a chink in the shutters, and seen her alone with Godfrey Somerville in that hateful house.

It is always so in this world—the people you find pleasant as friends and companions, who brighten your life with occasional gleams of cheering sunshine, fall away like leaves in autumn; whilst those who lower your spirits by the mere tone of their "How d'ye do," stick to you like a burr out of a thicket.

If he could only be content to stay in Ireland—surely the Curragh was far enough off from friends, or cousins! The pay might be better in India, but he had never thought that a sufficient inducement for exile, when they discussed the future together amongst the cabbage-roses and hollyhocks in the prim little garden at Elstone; and now that he was going to marry one of the richest heiresses in Blankshire, money would be less necessary than it was before.

Her hand stole down to the chain which was hanging at her side—the tears came into her eyes. How good he had always been to her—better than any brother; and she had often grieved him—often teased and plained him, just to see how easily she could drive the colour out of his honest face, and make his blue eyes flash fire.

"When I die," she thought to herself, with that sudden longing for death which passes over the most worldly soul in times of trouble, "this shall be buried with me; and when he hears that I wished it to be so, he will know that I loved him in spite of everything. Oh, Heavens! if he would only believe it now!"

She dropped down on her knees, and buried her face on the crimson velvet covering of a sofa, tortured by jealousy of Dulsie Arkwright, and yet feeling in the depths of her own inner consciousness that if it had not been for Godfrey Somerville she would never have had a rival in Cyril's heart. Pride would have kept her from all regret if she had not been able to treasure this secret conviction. It was like a nugget of gold, hidden away in a miser's cupboard—a source of joy to herself, but never to be disclosed to any eyes but her own.

Time passed on, but she took no count of it till she was startled by the stable-clock striking

twelve, and the window being opened behind her at the same instant as the door.

Afraid of moving lest Godfrey Somerville should be there, she kept quite still, though she wished herself safe in her own room; and utterly unconscious of her presence, Mr. Mallon, to her surprise, broke the silence.

"Well!"

A rough voice answered from just inside the window: "I watched 'em all night, so close that not so much as a weasel could ha' slipped through without my hanging on to 'im—"

"It isn't safe to stay here. Just tell me it as short as you can," said Mr. Mallon, hastily, "and I'll hear the rest outside. Is there anyone in the house?"

"Ay, they be there, sure enough. Leastways, I saw the old woman with my own eyes, and she talked of the other. There's to be a flitting at three o'clock on Wednesday morning. I made a note of the time."

"At three o'clock! Who was she talking to?"

"This young gent here, with the taller-candle face, and the black eyes. They got their heads close together, and 'ad no idea I was speerin' at 'em, through the hedge."

"Hush! someone is coming," interrupted Mr. Mallon, in a whisper. "Go to the stable-yard—ask for my groom—say you are a farrier—and I'll join you directly."

Joe Stevens nodded, touched his forehead, and disappeared.

"Three o'clock!" murmured Mr. Mallon, thoughtfully, as he softly closed the window behind his amateur detective. "At three o'clock my name shall be cleared, and Dulsie won't!"

CHAPTER XL.

LADY KINDERLEY was an eccentric old lady of immense wealth, who periodically took a fancy to some young man of her acquaintance, offered to provide for his future, and promised to make him her heir.

As she was full of whims and caprices, the favourite was sure to be out of favour before two years had passed, and after having had his eyes dazzled by the prospect of unlimited riches, found himself not much better off than he was before.

But if the old lady had happened to die, whilst he was still her adopted son, he would probably have succeeded to nearly the whole of her property; so discontent was left him as a legacy, and a tendency to covet what he had learnt to consider his proper share of his neighbour's goods.

Cyril Vere had no idea of the danger he was risking when he gave a thundering knock at the door of No. 15, Chesterfield-gardens.

Lady Kinderley, a delicate old lady with a thin, aristocratic face, and fluffy white curls, which encircled her forehead beneath the folds of her tulle cap, rose from her armchair as Cyril was ushered into the drawing-room by a solemn butler, and extended a tiny benighted hand in cordial welcome.

"I have to thank you, for taking the trouble to call on a solitary old woman. Pray sit down?" pointing to a high-backed chair, placed close to a roaring fire, "and tell me if there is anything I can do to forward your prospects in life. You are a soldier, I perceive," looking at his card. "A captain in the Royal Irish Fusiliers?"

"For the present," with a slight smile. "Next month I exchange into the 3rd Bengal Light Infantry and start for India."

"That must not be. Excuse me, but my curiosity does not arise from unworthy motives. What was the reason for your wishing to leave England?"

"There were a good many, which I needn't trouble you with," flushing a little under her scrutinizing eyes. "The extra pay was naturally a consideration."

A smile flickered across the withered lips. Crossing her hands in her lap, the diamonds in her rings flashing through her black mittens, she said, quietly: "Do you remember

that morning, many years ago, when you saved a boy from drowning on the Devonshire coast?"

"I remember pulling Godfrey Somerville out of the water. There was nothing in that. I would have done the same for a dog."

"There was this," with gentle persistence.

"By your courage you saved me from a life-long nightmare. If you had not been there, and acted with such presence of mind, I should have worried myself during all the succeeding years of my life over the hundred yards which intervened between me and the rock from which that boy slipped. You saved me from that uneasiness, and for that service I owe you a debt of gratitude."

"The service is not worth remembering. How bitterly cold it is!" trying to change the subject.

"Yes, it is a very severe winter, but we must be thankful that the snow has kept off. When I was a girl, I remember being out off from all communication with the outer world for the space of six weeks. That would not be tolerated now."

"No, indeed. We go ahead so fast that anything might happen in the space of six weeks, and it would be a bore to come out, like a second Rip Van Winkle, and find the world completely changed."

"Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"No. I am the sole representative of a quiet old country parson, and his Lady-Bountiful wife. They live at Elstone, Rutlandshire, and care for nothing much beyond the bounds of the parish."

"Except yourself!" looking with admiring eyes at the soldierly figure and good-looking face just opposite to her.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm afraid I've been a great disappointment to my father. He wanted me to preach, and I wanted to fight. Saving my country from an imaginary foe was more in my line than trying to save a soul, and making a bungle of it."

"You haven't the face for a cassock," with a slight smile, as she remembered some passing fancy of her youth, before she married the late Sir Charles. "But that is no reason why you should be a soldier. Surely there is some other equally honourable career open to a young gentleman of your position?"

"My position, what is it? The Veres are of an old family, who transmitted their blue blood with an empty purse."

"You will not be able to fill it in the army."

"I know that well enough; but I have learnt to exist on little beyond my pay, and I am content."

"Do you make both ends meet?" with a slight twinkle in her eyes.

A slight pause. "Sometimes."

"What a pity it is! Here am I, an old woman tottering on the brink of the grave, with thousands lying useless at the bank, and you with hand and head ready to make use of them, and yet you can't, because you grudge me the pleasure of returning the service you rendered me."

"Indeed I don't," with a good-humoured smile. "The next time I am drowning I will let you save me with the greatest pleasure—if you can."

"Because you know I couldn't. Captain Vere, I have been studying your face ever since you have been in the room, and I can see that it is the face of an honest man!" she exclaimed, impulsively. "I have been cruelly used by those I trusted best, I have been obliged to discard them one after another, till I am left quite alone; and solitude oppresses me. By your own confession, you have no binding ties. Your choice of a profession has estranged your father and mother—"

"I did not say all that!" hastily.

"No? I thought you did; at least I infer that all their interests are centred in their parish, so that the presence of their son is not essential to their happiness. I have been making inquiries about you,"—with a little nod—"you must not be angry with me. Your chief friends are the Arkwrights, with whom

my family have been friends for three generations, and I am told there is a chance of your being more closely connected."

"There is not a word of truth in it!" with a frown.

"Dear me! it seemed such a happy coincidence, and I was so pleased to hear that poor Miss Dulcie had found some consolation for her past sorrows. She was very fond of Mr. Maltravers."

"She is as fond of him now as she was three years ago."

"But she could not preserve the same affection for a man who was accused of murder?"

"Why not, if he is innocent?" raising his eyebrows.

"But the dock—he actually stood in the dock," in a tone of gentle remonstrance.

"Yes, and she would have given anything to stand by his side."

"Ah!" with a deep sigh; "there is but little maidenly modesty left."

"If you knew Miss Arkwright better, you would be obliged to confess that she was as near the angels as it is possible for human nature to be!" his face kindling with enthusiasm as he thought of her noble devotion.

"You could scarcely say more if you were in love with her. Come, Captain Vere, confess the truth, you are going to marry her!" and leaning forward, she laid her hand upon his arm.

He looked down on it with a smile, thinking what a tiny thing it was to wear such big diamonds; and then, raising his eyes, looked her straight in the face.

"The dearest wish I have is to see her married to Victor Maltravers!"

"Not after all that has happened!" shrinking back in dismay.

"Surely; the more unfortunate, the more beloved."

"But it would be such a dreadful thing for the Arkwrights."

"I don't see it. If I were Jack, I should be proud of it."

"But some people persist in thinking him guilty."

"Some people have a craze for sensation, and can't recover the disappointment of not hanging a baronet's son on the gallows."

"I know a very good man," with a solemn shake of her head, "who thought the evidence went against him."

"And I know a very wicked one, who would have liked to hang him with his own hands!"

"Dear, dear! how very shocking! For myself I can truly say that I always pitied him from the bottom of my heart; and if he had been lodged in Newgate, I fully intended to go and see him."

"A good thing he did not know it, or he might have been sorry to be let out," a smile curling the tips of his moustaches.

"Don't laugh at me!"

"Indeed, I wouldn't for the world!" in eager protest.

"But you did," shaking her forefinger at him. "You seem a warm partisan of this Mr. Maltravers."

"Yes. I did not know so much about him years ago, but now he is one of my best friends. I met him again in Ireland."

"Dear me, I hope he will not take it into his head to come over here. It would be most disastrous if he and Dulcie met."

"She will never marry anyone else!"

"Then she must die an old maid, which, anyhow, is a much better fate than being pointed at as the wife of a possible murderer. Have you no matrimonial views yourself?"

"None," looking over her white cap at an exquisite face by Greuze, which reminded him somewhat in outline and expression of Nella—that tormenting, fascinating little cousin who was destined to be the plague of his life.

"By-and-by, perhaps, you will tell me. And now I want you to promise me something. Will you take pity on a lonely old woman, and, whenever you are in London, make this your home."

"I'm awfully obliged to you for asking me,

but when I'm in Bengal your pretty little house will be rather out of reach."

A cloud came over her face.

"I hate India! All my life it has been to me like one large cemetery, which has swallowed up my best friends, one by one. Is it quite settled?"

"I wrote the letter last night—and that reminds me"—putting his hand into his pocket. "I never posted it! What a memory I have!"

She rose from her seat, and stood before him, a quaint little figure in black satin and old point, with an expression of pathetic earnestness on her withered face.

"You have not the frankness to tell me, but I have not lived so long in the world without gaining some experience of my fellow-creatures. You are going to India; first, because you cannot afford to live on your pay in England, and you do not wish to be a burden on your parents; secondly, because you have suffered some slight disappointment in love, and you want to put the seas between yourself and the girl you like best in the world."

He bit his lip, and looked over her head once more at that picture by Greuze. Nella's eyes seemed to reproach him from the canvas.

"Is this wise?" she went on, softly, scarcely able to reach the point of his chin with her eyes, because he towered so far above her.

"Directly I looked upon your face, I conceived a hope that I had found a son to be a comfort to my lonely old age. If you go to India, I shall be dead before you ever come back, and the money which might have kept you here, and given some pleasure to the last days of my life, can only be left you as a legacy!"

Profoundly touched, he scarcely knew what to say.

"Indeed, you are very good, but I couldn't touch it, I have no claim on you."

"You can't help having it, but you can throw it into the sea when you've got it. But as to the other affair, I suppose it is some small misunderstanding which has parted you; and then when the poor girl is sorry for having grieved you, you won't be there to know it, and she will break her heart."

"No chance of that," with a sudden frown. "She will marry someone else."

"Has she told you so?" still incredulous, because it seemed to her, old woman though she was, that with such a face as his, which seemed the index to a noble character, if he won a girl's heart once, he would know how to keep it.

"No, but I am not blind!"

"You are unlike most lovers if you are not," drily. "The girl is Eleanor Maynard, I suppose, who was brought up in your own home, and now lives with the Somervilles?"

He flushed hotly; and no other answer was needed.

"A girl who is utterly alone in the world, with no one to take care of her but yourself," she went on, reflectively. "Of course the man you say she is going to marry is a good, honourable, upright gentleman, or you could not have gone to India with a quiet mind."

"He is a scoundrel!" with suppressed vehemence.

"And yet you could leave this lonely girl in his hands. Captain Vere, I am surprised at you!"

"I could only do her harm by staying here," he muttered, under his moustaches.

"Harm? That could only be if she liked you best. Mark my words, you will never forgive yourself if you go away."

"She won't take my advice."

"Not now, but presently she will," in a tone of quiet conviction. "Have you ever advised her to marry you?"

"How could I?" opening his eyes in amazement.

"Ah! I understand it all," with a sapient little nod. "At least you might have told her that you could not propose to her, and then she would have known where she stood."

"A poor compliment!" with a short laugh.

"If I had gone further, and made a fool of my self, and she hadn't snubbed me, where should we have been then?"

"In a fool's Paradise, from which you would have woken in a real one," she said, quietly. "Throw that letter into the fire, and write another, saying you have changed your mind."

"I can't. You are very good to trouble your head about me, but it is too late."

"I tell you it is your duty—you have no choice."

"I have no choice, you're right; but it's just the other way."

"Have you thought what may be the end of the purest girl, when linked to a bad man? When the whiteness of the lily is once lost, it can never be brought back, and an infamous life lived under the sight of innocent eyes, robs those eyes of their innocence, as surely as rust eats into steel."

His face was white and stern, as he drew the letter from his pocket, and threw it into the flames.

To have saved Nella from such a fate he would have thrown up every hope in his profession.

Lady Kindersley stretched out her hand, the tears in her eyes. "I knew that I could not be mistaken. You have a noble heart."

(To be continued.)

REDEEMED BY FATE.

—O—

CHAPTER XXVII.

ALTHOUGH, owing to Philip's refusal of the Indian appointment, one effect on which Sir Jasper Ruthven had reckoned as a certain result of his revelation did not follow; his conviction that it would hasten the young man's departure was not miscalculated, for Greville recoiled with a sick loathing from any longer sharing the same roof as that which sheltered him, who, in spite of the relationship between them, he could only regard as a cold hearted rascal, careless of who suffered so long as he obtained the gratification of his own selfish desires.

He had never liked Sir Jasper; but now he absolutely detested him, and the shock of his confession was in effect terrible. Unconsciously, even to himself, he had built up a fabric of bright visions on the discovery of the secret shrouding his birth, and now he longed with untold vehemence that it had remained wrapped for ever in its original obscurity, and that he had been spared a knowledge of the humiliating truth.

"I must not give myself time to think of it; I must try my hardest to drive it from my mind!" he muttered, knowing even while he spoke the words how useless the endeavour would be.

He resolved to leave for London by the mid-night express—he could not go before because of seeing Lord Urwicke; and besides, he was hoping to catch a glimpse of Haidee, and wish her good-bye.

He proceeded straight to his rooms, and began packing up his luggage; and when he had nearly finished, went downstairs to the butler to ask him for some oil to grease the lock of his portmanteau, which had become rusty.

"I am going to town to-night by the 12.10 train, Purser," he observed, putting the small bottle of oil, with which the man supplied him, into his pocket; "but as it will be rather late to have the dog-cart, my luggage can be sent on to-morrow morning. I have already addressed it, so will you see that it goes?"

Purser promised to do so, and then Philip went to the telegraph office, which was at the station, and which he knew closed early.

"I had better send and tell Pierson to get me a bed at A—'s Hotel, otherwise I may have to perambulate the streets all night," he thought to himself as he walked along under

the trees. "Good heavens! what a tangled labyrinth life is—what a mingling of cross currents—a game of chance and change!"

He might well say that, in view of all that had happened even within the last twenty-four hours—events had indeed precipitated themselves, and it seemed as if he were fated to be the principal performer in the various life dramas now in course of enactment beneath the roof of Heathcliff Priors!

Heathcliff was not a large station, and, as a rule, was quietude itself; but this evening, owing to a fair that had taken place in the neighbourhood, it was crowded with holiday-making rustics, who were shouting out comic songs at the top of their voices, and conducting themselves in the generally hilarious and disorderly manner that seems to embody the ideas of enjoyment possessed by the lower order of the British public.

Philip picked his way among them with some little difficulty, and wired off this message. "Greville, Heathcliff, to R. Pierson—Smith's Buildings, Temple. Am coming up to-night. Engage me a bed at A——'s Hotel. Will be with you first thing in the morning."

Then he left the station, and returned by an unfrequented way skirting the park, and arrived at the Priors without meeting anyone. At the stained-glass window against which he was standing when he had hurt his wrist, and first saw Sir Jasper, he paused and looked out at the landscape, softened, as we all are, at the idea of saying good-bye. He remembered the feelings with which he had regarded it on that first evening; and then by a very natural transition, his thoughts wandered to the night when he had followed Sir Jasper to this end of the passage, and been mystified by his inexplicable disappearance.

"He told a lie when he said he passed me," he muttered. "There must be some hiding-place, or exit near, and he availed himself of it. If I could only discover it, that affair of the hand last night might be cleared up."

He utterly refused to place any credence in the supernatural, and reason told him that human hands did not appear—except at the Egyptian Hall, perhaps, under the guidance of Messrs. Maskelyne and Cooke—without the body to which they belonged; thus it followed that the owner of the one he had seen must have been concealed behind the green baize curtain, although when he looked he had not discovered anyone. Prompted by a sudden impulse, the artist raised the drapery and made an even more careful examination than he had done the previous evening.

There were three panels, all carved very elaborately in oak; the centre one represented the trio of goddesses on Mount Ida, and Paris, "beautiful Paris, evil-hearted Paris," awarding the apple to golden-haired Aphrodite, while Wisdom and Power looked on in angry displeasure—the allegory that repeats itself, and will go on repeating itself till the end of time!

It struck Philip the fruit was rather more raised from the surface of the wood than the trees and foliage by which it was surrounded, so to this he directed his efforts, pressing it on every side with all his force. At length he was rewarded with success; the faintest possible click was heard, and the panel moved aside, thus disclosing an aperture amply wide enough for a man to pass through.

Just for a moment Philip stood looking at it, almost as much taken aback as if it had come upon him by surprise, instead of being the result of a premeditated search. Afterwards the excitement of adventure upon him, he went to his room, fetched a piece of cord, and a wax taper, and with the former tied back the panel to prevent all possibility of its closing.

Then he entered the opening.

Left alone, Sybil Ruthven had remained for nearly half-an-hour, motionless, and in exactly the same attitude, while with maddening persistency one sentence echoed its terror through her brain;—

"He will tell Claud what I have done!"

Of the crime itself she thought infinitely less than of its failure; but she knew that Lord Urwicke would draw back, shocked beyond expression, when he learned that her hand had been lifted against his wife's life—yes, even if, as she hoped, he might yet love her better than the woman who bore his name. At the anticipation of his contempt, she grovelled in a very anguish of shame, bitterer than even death itself to her proud spirit.

"What evil fate sent this Philip Greville to cross my path, and thwart me!" she muttered at length, rising and throwing back the loosened strands of her night-black hair, while her hands clasped and unclasped themselves in a fever of restlessness. "Other women have done as much as I for the man they loved, and the world has never been the wiser—is it that I was born under an unlucky star, or have I only miscalculated?"

There must have been some want in her moral nature, the lack of which wrapped her in an impenetrable cloak of egotism, that rendered her actually callous to any sufferings save her own. Like Sir Jasper, she was utterly selfish, and like him she imagined her will strong enough to overcome all difficulties. No Eumenides would ever have power to lash her with the scorpion-stings of awakened conscience, for the simple reason that she did not possess a conscience; and so the only possibility of remorse reaching her would be if she failed to accomplish the object she had set herself.

Her love for Claud Urwicke, wild, intense, unreasoning as it was, was yet in its essence the purest passion of her nature. For him she would have borne misery, pain, degradation—anything, in fact, that Fate could inflict, and would have gloried in the sacrifice, much as Heloise gloried when her devotion to Abelard was flung back upon her with contumely and insult.

But that he should know her as she was—a murderess, taken red-handed—that he should shrink from her, with loathing in his eyes, and words of abhorrence on his lips—to this any other humiliation would be preferable.

Of what might follow—a trial, public exposure, conviction—she thought little, and cared less—all her terrors ended in the one supreme fear of his contempt; and beyond this she did not look.

At last she paused in the monotonous regularity of her walk up and down.

"I will go to Greville, and plead to him once more!" she exclaimed aloud, with a gesture of extremest despair. "It will probably be useless; but for all that I won't give up till my last chance has vanished."

She went to the glass and bound up her hair, starting back almost in horror, as she saw her own ghastly reflection. Her cheeks and lips were perfectly colourless, and her eyes, larger, darker, brighter than ever, seemed to take up the greater part of her face.

"I don't think there would be much danger of anyone falling in love with me now!" she said, with a hard, mirthless laugh; and then she opened the door, and crept cautiously along the passages until she came to the artist's apartment.

There she paused, for at the end of the passage she saw Philip in the act of securing an open panel with a piece of cord, and her quick brain instantly seized the truth of what had, in reality, occurred.

She drew back so that he should not see her, and watched him look round as if to make sure he was alone, and then vanish through the aperture, while she was wondering how such an exit could have existed without having come to her knowledge—for she had spoken the truth when telling Greville she knew nothing whatever about it.

A minute later, gathering her skirts closely round her to prevent their rustling, and stepping as lightly as a shadow, she had reached the opening and passed through, to find herself at the head of a narrow, stone staircase which Philip had evidently descended.

At the bottom ran a passage, equally narrow, and composed of huge blocks of masonry covered with a slimy sort of damp that threw out a close and unwholesome odour, and on the right was a room that had once perhaps served as a cell for refractory monks in the days when Heathcliff Priors was an old abbey, under the stern yoke of Papal dominion.

This room Philip had entered, and was now standing with his back to the door, and the taper held above his head, apparently in the act of examining it.

Outside Sybil paused, an evil glitter that the darkness hid coming in her eyes. A sudden idea had darted through her subtle brain, and she bent down to examine the fastening of the door, which was one of solid oak, standing partially ajar just as the young man had pushed it.

All that secured it was a heavy iron bolt.

One moment's pause, one swift flash of compunction, vanishing as Claud Urwicke's face rises before her—then, her lips setting themselves close together, and her heart beating so fast that it threatens to suffocate her, she draws the door quickly to, shoots forward the bolt, and Philip Greville is a prisoner at her mercy!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HALF-AN HOUR later Lord Urwicke stood in his wife's dressing-room, facing Dr. Clifford and the great London physician who had travelled down with him from town.

"Dying!" he said, in a low, awed whisper. "Good Heaven! Can nothing be done to save her?"

He looked wildly from one to the other, but they only turned away, as if—accustomed as they were to such sights—the deathly pallor of his face provoked their pity.

He sank down on a chair, covering his face with his hands, and groaning. He had come from London immediately on receiving the telegram telling him of Muriel's condition, and as has been said, had journeyed in company with Sir James C—a tall, white-haired man, whose fame had passed through all the land, but who confessed himself powerless to cope with the fell disease that had stricken Lady Urwicke, stealing all her strength, and eating away the vigour of her young life, as a worm eats the heart of a rose in its bloom.

And of the nature of the malady the London physician could say no more than had already been said by Dr. Clifford.

Upon Claud the intelligence came with the force of a thunderbolt, for he had not the smallest idea of Muriel's danger, and even now he could hardly bring himself to realize it.

"Surely you must be mistaken—even doctors make mistakes sometimes!" he exclaimed, starting up eagerly with that desperate clinging to hope that forbids our despairing until the very last shred of doubt has vanished. "She is so young—her constitution is so good—oh! it is cruel—cruel to think of her dying!"

The elder physician gently shook his head—he knew that the Great Destroyer makes no distinction between old and young, often indeed gathering the youngest and fairest from our midst.

"Have other advice—send to London—do all that is possible!" added the Viscount, and Sir James laid his hand on his arm.

"My dear Lord Urwicke, everything that can be done will be—of that you may rest assured. But not all the advice in the world can avert the end."

"And what is she dying from?" his voice hollow and strained, as he put the question.

"A form of lung disease, whose origin I am unable to explain, but I think there must have been an hereditary tendency."

This was the reply the physician gave, but Urwicke's own conscience whispered another answer, and that was, "A broken heart!"

"Would you not like to see her?" put in

Dr. Clifford. "She has just woke, and is perfectly conscious, and able to speak, but you must control your agitation lest she should suspect its cause."

"Then she does not know her own danger?"

"No, we have deemed it advisable to keep her in ignorance as yet."

Muriel was lying in bed, propped up by pillows, and with some fleecy white shawls wrapped round her, for though it was sultry summer weather she had complained of cold. Her face was blanched to a dead whiteness, save where the blue shadows had deepened, and her large eyes seemed even more lovely and lustrous than when she had been in perfect health. They met her husband's as he entered, and he came and stood by the side of the bed, raising her nerveless hand, and holding it clasped closely in his.

"Have you been back long?" she asked, faintly.

"No—not half-an-hour. I should have come before—indeed, I would not have gone away at all had I known you were so ill," he answered, making a great effort to repress all outward signs of agitation.

"You could not have done me any good if you had stayed," she said, and gently as the words were uttered, they yet cut like a knife into the heart of him to whom they were addressed.

No, he could not have done her any good, for although he was her husband, no bond of sympathy existed between them. The circle of their lives had never touched, and he was as far removed from her as the veriest stranger.

He thought of Philip Greville, the man he believed she loved, and in that moment there was no bitterness in his heart, only pity; and he wondered whether she would die happier if she saw him once more, and wished him good-bye.

"Have you any wish that it is in my power to gratify?" he said, in a low, earnest voice, bending down over her; "if so, do not hesitate to tell me, and I promise that you shall have it."

She looked a little surprised, but made a faint gesture of negation.

"Is there no one you would like to see?"

"No!" Then with a searching look in his eyes, "that is a strange thing to ask me. What made you think of it?"

He did not answer, and turned away his head to avoid meeting her gaze.

Suddenly he felt a strange sort of quiver stir her fingers as they lay in his.

"I think I understand," she said, slowly, her eyes slightly dilating, and never moving from his, "you imagine I am going to die. Is that it?"

He was silent.

"Are you afraid to tell me? Do you think I shall be frightened?" she continued, with a dim, uncertain smile, and an accent almost surprised in her voice. "There is surely nothing so very terrible in death—nothing to draw back from. It seems to me like a long rest, and"—sinking back on the pillows with a weary movement of unconscious pathos—"I am very tired!"

Yes, tired of her life—tired of the hope deferred that maketh the heart sick—tired of the longing for a love that she told herself would never come—tired of feeling herself a hated burden to the man who called her wife!

The world might be in itself very fair, but what were its beauties to the eyes that only saw them "through a glass darkly," and that glass the mirror of dull despair?

She was young, but what did her youth promise save a lengthening out of the sad years into a vista of unutterable dreariness?

Surely Azrael had come to her in pity for her loneliness; his dark wings, already hovering about her head, would shut out the unhappy future, and bear her away, where both throbbing heart and aching brain would cease to pain, to the land of eternal rest!

"Muriel!" cried Claud, in a very anguish of desire to prove his repentance for the wrong

he had done in marrying her for the sake of the dower she brought him, "I would willingly lay down my life to save yours. Do you believe me?"

"Yes," she answered, the faintest possible shade of pink drifting into her cheeks, while a look he had not yet learnt to fathom came in her sweet, lustrous eyes. "Why should I doubt your word? But you are wrong in wishing such a thing, for when I am gone"—she broke off, shuddering—who among us can bear to think of the world, when for us individually it shall have ceased?—"when I am gone you will be able to do so much that—"

"Hush!" entreatingly, while he raised his hand to his eyes, and from between the fingers two great drops—the tears of a strong man's agony—forced their way through.

She looked pained—even incredulous at first, and put out her wan, weak fingers to touch the spots they had made on the linen.

"Are those for me?" she asked, her eyes looking at him with grave wonderment, "are you indeed sorry, so sorry?"

"Sorry! Oh Heaven! how weak language is to express such feelings as mine! The word only gives you a dim idea of what I would say."

She was silent for a few minutes, the pale colour still wavering in her cheeks like the flickering light of a taper inside some delicate alabaster vase.

In accordance with her wishes the blind had been drawn up, and through the window streamed a narrow silver radiance from the arc of the young moon, set far away in the depths of the star-strewn sky. Muriel's eyes wandered towards it, and she breathed a little sigh.

"Things—the things we have been accustomed to see every day of our lives, look so different when we are gazing on them for the last time," she murmured, almost in a soliloquy. "It seems to me Heaven itself cannot be fairer than this beautiful earth of ours."

"And yet this same earth has given you but little happiness!"

"Not very much," she sighed. "I suppose it must be true we hold very little power either for good or evil in our own hands. There is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will!"

She turned her head on one side, and closed her eyes, as with a great weariness. Lord Urwicke rose and smoothed her pillows, touching them with fingers as light and tender as a woman's; and then, moved by an impulse beyond his control, forgetful of Philip, knowing only in this supreme moment that the woman he had grown to love with a love as different to that he had given Sybil as is the gaudy glare of artificial light from the radiance of the sun at noon, lay there, dying, he leaned down and pressed his lips to hers in one long, clinging kiss that was at the same time a declaration and a farewell.

"Claud!" she murmured, below her breath, exerting her small remaining strength, and raising herself so as to be on a level with him, while her eyes sought his, eagerly, imploringly, wonderingly. "Did I dream, or—are the death mists closing round me already? I thought you kissed me."

Instead of answering, he fell on his knees and buried his face in his hands.

"And it was the first time your lips had ever touched mine," she continued, dreamily. "I wonder—if I had lived—"

She paused, exhausted, and Claud gave her some medicine already poured out in a glass on the table by the bedside, and held her in his arms while she drank it. After he put the glass down, he made no attempt to alter his position, and she never moved her head from where it rested on his shoulder—so close to him that he could follow the course of each blue vein that wandered across her temple, and lost itself beneath the soft dark rings of her hair.

Sir James C— came softly in, looked at her, and then passed out in silence and left

husband and wife alone, shaking his head ominously as he joined the other doctor in the dressing-room.

"Human skill can do nothing for her, poor young thing!" he said, sorrowfully. "It is impossible she can have many more hours to live now."

In the sick chamber was an intense silence, broken only by the ticking of a clock on the shelf, and the fluttering of a moth round the night-light. Outside the glory of the moon-shine had grown wider, and a soft wind had sprung up to wander in long sighs among the faintly shivering leaves, and cause the ivy to touch the window with a sound like the tapping of fingers against the glass. Claud involuntarily shuddered as he heard it.

"If I could only redeem the past!" he muttered to himself.

The past!—irrevocable, irretrievable, vanished for ever into that dim shadow land, whose ghosts come back in the after years to vex us with their presence! It is so hard to remember that all we do or say, every word, every action of this *now*, go to form a volume to which, in the after time, we can neither add to nor take from one single sentence! But, oh! surely hardest of all is it, when our beloved are left from us, with all the tenderness that was in our hearts, unspoken, uncomprehended! What would we not give to have them back for an hour—one moment even, in which to look in their eyes, to pour out the hot passionate regret for opportunities wasted, the love that has burnt and seared our very souls with its lava tide, but which alas! nothing can ever redeem!

"I suppose," Muriel said, presently, opening her eyes, and speaking in weak, disconnected sentences; "Heaven knows best, and—I am content!"

She shivered slightly, and he drew the folds of the shawl about her, and held her closer in his arms, as if he thought the vigorous life flowing in his own veins might impart its warmth to her chill and languid pulses.

Again she closed her eyes, and, after a little while, a calm settled on her face—so white, so still, that Claud's heart sank with the nameless, impalpable fear that even the boldest of us feel when in Death's great presence. Was she, indeed, gone! Had the soul left its fragile earthly tenement, and was that he held to his breast only a mass of clay—cold, feelingless as a marble statue?

A strong shudder shook him, but he did not move, and so the moments wore on, each marked by the ticking of the clock, and, with a strange sort of inconsistency that comes to us even in our times of deepest suffering, some verses he had read were suggested by the sound, and kept on repeating themselves:—

"By day its value is low and light,
But in the silent dead of night,
Distinct as a passing footstep's fall,
It echoes along the vacant hall,
Along the ceiling, along the floor,
And seems to say at each chamber door—
Forever—never,
Forever—never!

"Through days of sorrow and days of birth,
Through days of death and days of birth,
Through every swift vicissitude
Of changeful time unchanged it has stood,
And, as if like God, it all things saw,
It calmly repeats those words of awe—
Forever—never,
Forever—never!

"There, in that silent room below,
The dead lay in his shroud of snow,
And, in the hush that followed the prayer,
Was heard the old clock on the stair—
Forever—never,
Forever—never!

By-and-by, Sir James C— and Dr. Clifford again entered the room together, and stood by the bedside. The former bent down, listened very attentively, and looked in the white, untroubled face.

"How long has she been thus?" he asked, in a whisper.

"About an hour," answered Urwicke, whose

face was drawn and haggard in the faint shadows of the dawning day. "Does it mean death?"

"No," was the reply. "Nature has done for her what physicians could not do. She sleeps, and she will live!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"Sun will live!"

Strong man as he was, the revelation of feeling was almost too great for Cland, and, but for the cushion in his arms, he would have flung himself on his knees, and poured out such prayers of gratitude as had not been on his lips since he knelt, a little child, at his mother's knee, and repeated them after her.

She would live! Heaven had granted his voiceless supplication, and countermanded his dread fiat, and the dark angel, spreading his wings, had withdrawn his mystic presence to let the life that had been so near sinking flicker again—faintly enough at first, but gathering strength day by day, hour by hour, now that it was no longer under the poison's baleful spell.

It was a very slow, very wearisome task this getting well; it meant lying in bed most of the day, being fed on beef tea, port wine, hot-house fruits—never lifting a hand to help one's self, but depending with a child's dependence on other people's ministrations. Nevertheless, it was not wholly unpleasant. True, just at first, Muriel was incredulous that her strength had utterly gone, and would not believe it until she tried to raise herself and found she could not.

But Cland was always near, ready to talk to her, to read to her, to sit by her side watching, while the slumber that did more towards calling health back to that languid frame than all Dr. Clifford's medicines, came with its popped balm; and in those hours husband and wife looked deeper into each other's souls than they had ever done before, and felt themselves drawn closer together, although even yet a shadow lay between them—for Urwicke still imagined Philip Greville was the man Muriel loved, and this idea naturally caused a certain restraint in his manner, of which she could not fail to be conscious.

And now he discovered how great a mistake he had made with regard to his wife. Instead of the cold, passionless, soulless creature he had imagined he found an intelligence equal, if not superior, to his own. A vivid imagination, full of dreamy, poetical fancies; a mind highly cultured, well read, and capable of close reasoning—in effect, that most perfect of Heaven's creatures, a clever woman—utterly womanly.

How different she was to Sybil, with her wild, ungovernable nature, which acknowledged neither discipline nor any other restraint that did not accord with her own wishes. He had seen very little of Sybil lately; for although she had made efforts to enter the invalid's room, both the doctor and nurse had opposed it, and Lady Urwicke herself was far from desiring her presence.

"I suppose," said Cland, one morning, as he sat by her couch, and, as he spoke, he half-turned away with a shade of embarrassment, "you know Mr. Greville has left Heathcliff Priory?"

"Left! No I was not aware of it. When did he go?"

"The night you were so ill."

"And where has he gone to?"

"That I can't tell—London, I suppose. It appears in the afternoon he and Sir Jasper had an interview, at which it was arranged he should leave, and so he went that same night, without even wishing anyone good-bye."

"But that was very strange, was it not?" said Muriel, thinking of Haidée. "Something must have happened, otherwise he would never have gone away."

"Why do you think so?" he asked, jealously.

"I have the best of all possible reasons for knowing it," she returned, with unconscious

emphasis, as she recalled what the artist had said to her, "a man does not willingly leave the house which contains what he cares most—"

She stopped suddenly, remembering she had no right to betray Philip's confidence, even to her husband; and Cland naturally put his own interpretation on the unfinished sentence.

When he spoke next there was a coldness in his voice that had not been there for a long time.

"You never asked me what it was took me to London," he observed.

"Business, I suppose."

"It was business in a measure. I went to purchase a villa at the Isle of Wight. I thought perhaps we might have some yachting this summer; and, besides, we have been Sir Jasper's guests long enough."

"Quite," she responded, emphatically.

"The rebuilding of the Towers will be finished by the autumn, so we can remain at Cowes until then—that is to say, if you like the sea."

"I love it—I am never tired of watching it."

"And I think you will like the villa as well."

It is very pretty, but rather small; however, that will not make much difference, as we need not keep up a large establishment. I have asked Dr. Clifford, and he says you had better go directly you feel strong enough, for the sea breezes are sure to do you good. I shall have the Bonitas there. By-the-bye, are you a good sailor?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"That is lucky. We shall be able to have plenty of yachting. You must make haste and get well enough to travel, and in the meantime I'll attend to the arrangements for the journey."

Mr. Darley had been down once to see Lady Urwicke, but did not stay long. He had some gigantic financial speculation on hand, which took up all his time and all his energies, and was of even more importance than his daughter.

Muriel was not sorry. She could but remember the manner in which her marriage had been brought about, and she knew perfectly well to whose fitness it was owing. Her father had acted, as he thought, for the best, but he had left out all questions of her happiness in his ambitious calculations.

Lord Urwicke lost no time in acquainting his host with his prospective arrangements.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Sir Jasper, when he heard them. "You must certainly stay until after the wedding."

"And when will that be?"

"Early in September—a very little while, you see."

"But the 'little while' might make all the difference in my wife's health, and that of course must be my first consideration."

Sir Jasper looked at him rather curiously.

"Certainly; and in the face of such an argument I cannot press you to remain. However, the Isle of Wight is not at the Antipodes, and so you may be able to return if Lady Urwicke is well enough."

"Yes. I suppose Mr. Darrell will be here?"

"I have written to ask him, but, as you know, he is a queer fellow, and has an insurmountable aversion to the neighbourhood of his old home. However, I should think he would conquer it for the sake of such an unique occasion as the marriage of his only daughter."

"Very strange, his leaving the Grange, and shutting it up as he did," remarked Urwicke.

"Do you understand his reasons?"

"I fancy the loss of his wife was the principal one, but he was misanthropical even in his youth, and now age and custom have intensified his solitary habits, and made him a complete recluse."

"By the way, have you heard anything of Greville?"

"Not a word. A cavalier fashion of treating us, wasn't it, going off like that?" said

Sir Jasper, airily, and he went outside to speak to the butler, just as his sister entered the room.

Lord Urwicke bit his lip with vexation—he would have given a good deal to have avoided a *deu à deu* with her at this precise juncture, but there was no help for it—he could not leave the room without absolute rudeness.

"I have just been informing your brother of our approaching departure," he observed.

"Ours! Whose do you mean?"—sharply.

"My wife's and my own. We have taxed your hospitality for a long while, haven't we?"

She cast a penetrating glance at him, and answered his question by another.

"When are you going?"

"In about a week if Muriel is strong enough—and she is improving very rapidly."

"Indeed! I have not seen her since her convalescence."

"The doctor thinks it better for her to avoid the excitement of visitors," he said, in excuse for her non-admission to the sick room, "he has denied Miss Darrell, too."

"But you are there constantly."

"That is a different thing; I am her husband so the cases are not parallel," he answered, gravely.

Sybil grew very pale, and put her hand to her heart as if it pained her.

"You seem to have added devotion to the rôle of late," she said, with unconcealed bitterness. "Suppose"—a sharp gleam crossing her face—"she had died!"

"She was near enough to death, but, thank Heaven! that danger is over now."

Sybil was standing close beside him. She was silent a minute, and then put her hand on his arm, and looked straight up into his eyes—a wild sort of appeal in her own.

"You are really thankful this is so—you are glad her life has been spared?" she said, in a low intense whisper.

"I am truly, heartfeltdly, unfeignedly, glad!" he answered, emphatically. "I rejoice as men do when what is dearest to them is snatched from the grave and given back to them!"

Her fingers, one by one, unloosed their clasp, she drew back, a sick despair slowly coming in her face.

He had not meant to be cruel, but if he had taken up a knife, and driven it in her bosom, the pain could not have been deadlier.

"Hold dearest!" she echoed, stonily, "and is she—your wife—the woman you hold dearest?"

"She is."

It was better to be plain with her—better to let her know the truth, so he reasoned, and now felt almost glad the opportunity had been given him for declaring it. Near neighbours as they were, it would be well-nigh an impossibility that they should not see a good deal of each other in the future, and, this being so, it was surely wisdom to clearly define their relative positions, and come to an understanding regarding them that would admit of no mistake.

Sybil's eyes never moved from their earnest study of his face, but she stood a little distance off him, one hand still pressed against her bosom, the other clutching firm hold of the back of a chair.

"I congratulate you on the control you have over your affections. Why?"—with a short, mirthless laugh—"you seem to have as little difficulty in transferring your love as in changing your coat!"

He moved rather uneasily. Even though he knew his attitude was justified and here was not, he was conscious of a sting in the words.

"Muriel is my wife. Is it not right I should love her?" he asked.

"No!" she exclaimed, with fierce emphasis, her eyes flashing angriest fire. "You saw me first, loved me first, would have married me if she had not come in the way, and I claim from you the faith I was willing to give! Do you think that though oceans had rolled between us, I should ever have changed?"



[AT THE END OF THE PASSAGE SYBIL SAW PHILIP SECURING AN OPEN PANEL WITH A PIECE OF CORD.]

"would have let another man take the place in my heart you had held? No, no!—a thousand times no!"

To describe the passionate, concentrated vehemence of her voice and manner would be impossible. He face had become flooded with crimson, her finely-pencilled brows met in a level line above the scornful splendour of her eyes, her breath came in quick, convulsive gasps, her whole frame trembled with intensest excitement.

"For Heaven's sake, calm yourself!" he exclaimed in alarm. "Suppose anyone should come in and see you thus?"

She laughed wildly.

"Let them come—let all the world come! I do not care! I have already borne the worst that can befall me!"

Claud Urwicke was an essentially nineteenth-century Englishman, hating with an extreme abhorrence anything that savoured of melodrama being dragged from its legitimate place—the boards of a theatre; and if Sybil had tried her hardest she could not have selected a more effectual method for rooting out his old fancy than the attitude she thus assumed.

It seemed to him that, for the first time, he comprehended her nature as it really was, and now that the glamour of romance had fallen from his eyes, and he was enabled to see clearly, he recoiled with a sensation akin to disgust from this self-abandonment.

It struck him as being low, and his fastidious taste revolted against it. She was nothing more nor less than a beautiful fury, and the sole excuse to be made for her was that she loved him!

"Is it not the truest wisdom to reconcile oneself to the inevitable?" he said, presently.

"According to a man's philosophy—yes."

"Why should not women accept it as well?"

"Because they are fools, and cannot reason. They can only love."

He was silent. Surely, he thought, no man

in the world was ever placed in such a position before.

Both by breeding and instinct he was a gentleman; and, fervently as he desired to do it, the task of settling his relations with her on the basis they must in future rest was absolutely repulsive to him.

He wished he had never seen her; he wished he had never brought Muriel to the Priors; he wished women were only amenable to reason like men; and finally and most fervently he wished himself a hundred miles away from that particular spot at that particular minute!

Of course he pitied her, and equally of course was much more inclined to look leniently on her conduct than if she had been the victim of misplaced passion for any other man than himself. All the same, he was heartily glad she was not his wife.

"We are none of us the arbiters of our own destinies," he said at last, a little tritely. "Everyone has to submit to the force of circumstances."

"And you seem to have found the submission both easy and pleasant," she retorted, her proud lips curling. "You need not make any excuses. I suppose it is the old story of woman's faith and man's falseness; but I little thought that I—I should ever be the victim." She put up her hand, and clasped her throat as if she were choking. "Well"—drawing a deep breath—"I am glad I know the truth; anything is better than inhabiting a fool's paradise."

Whatever her faults—and they, alas, were many and terrible!—this much may be said, her love for Claud Urwicke was true—perhaps the only true thing in her wicked, restless nature.

"I could have borne anything," she added, passionately, after a moment's pause, "anything save being displaced by this woman! If we had been leagues apart I would not have minded. If I had known that never as long as we lived were we fated to set eyes on each

other again, I would still have been content; but this"—her voice dropping to a low hoarse whisper—"is worst of all—worst of all!"

She thought of the black crimes in which she had steeped her soul in order to keep that which was no longer hers. Her sin had all been of no avail, and retribution had come. Verily,—

"Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all!"

(To be continued.)

If fortune has fairly sat on a man, he takes it for granted that life consists in being sat, upon. But to be coddled on fortunes knee and then have his ears boxed, that is aggravating.

OUTBREAK OF FEVER AND THE MILK SUPPLY.—It cannot be too often pointed out that in the majority of cases all large outbreaks of enteric fever and scarlet fever in London are due to the milk supply. The present outbreak at Camden Town illustrates the point. It must be remembered that under the present conditions by which the metropolis is supplied with milk, there are three distinct sources of danger—first, the state of health of the cows from which the milk is obtained; next, the state of health and the surroundings of those who milk the cows; and, lastly, the mode in which the cans are cleansed in which the milk is stored and conveyed to London. It has been proved that any one of these three sources is quite capable of developing a large outbreak of fever. In the recent outbreak at St. Pancras the most probable cause would appear to have been the filthy water in which some of the cans were cleansed. The public are indebted to the *Lancet* and other medical journals for the manner in which they have drawn attention to these sources of danger to the public health.—*Society.*



["OH, ESTELLA, MY LOVE! I HAVE, INDEED, SUFFERED DOUBLE FOR MY SIN AGAINST YOU!"]

NOVELETTE.]

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

CHAPTER I.

"RUPERT, old fellow, that woman has broken my heart and yet—in spite of the misery she has brought upon me—I cannot help loving her more every day of my life. You tell me to be a man and forget her, but you don't know what it is to be hopelessly in love—to feel that your life as well as your happiness is at the disposal of a woman. Forget her! Why I could not do so now were I to make the attempt. You may think me a weak fool, but, sleeping or waking, her image is never absent from my mind, while no ray of hope comes to illumine the darkness that her own words, so lightly spoken, brought down upon me only a few months ago. It was horribly cruel to lead me on, to encourage my attentions for awhile, only to cast me off like a worn-out glove later on. I shall never feel the old energy, the old restless ambition again. She has robbed me of all that once made life precious, and so well worth living. She is a murderess, for she has stabbed me to the heart and killed my happiness; but the law does not recognize or punish such crimes as hers, since the victim continues to live."

And as Rupert Clitheroe gazed upon the bowed, nerveless form, and the sadly altered face of the friend he loved so dearly, he mentally cursed the fair heartless woman who had stripped all the glory and gladness from the young life, while a great longing to inflict some swift subtle punishment upon her in return for her pitiless conduct, took possession of the usually cool, stoical man of the world.

From the time when they had rowed, played cricket, and made some faint pretence of learning together at Eton, Rupert Clitheroe and Herbert, Lord Carruthers, had been firm friends.

Both at school and college this friendship had stood its ground, in spite of the remarks, either satirical or jesting, that an intimacy so close and lasting had elicited from others.

And indeed the two young men could hardly hope to escape remark, since such a strange deep friendship—almost resembling that which once existed between David and Jonathan—is seldom to be met with among men. They never made any demonstration of goodwill, or strong affection towards each other; they had but few opinions in common, and they criticised each other's failings in a merciless manner.

At the same time a thorough understanding existed between them, and their friendship was built on a firm rock of mutual respect and liking that would enable it to stand the pitiless wear and tear of years without fear of an overthrow.

Herbert Carruthers, the last male scion of a good old English family, had on his coming of age succeeded to a princely estate in Cumberland. Several reckless go-ahead ancestors had, between them, managed to impoverish the estate considerably in years gone by.

But it had been carefully nursed during the young lord's minority, and when he came into possession it yielded an income second to few others throughout the kingdom.

He had much, very much, to make life worth living, since nature had been almost as bountiful in her gifts to him as fortune.

The fair, wavy hair that clustered carelessly over his square white forehead, the dark blue eyes, and features faultless as those of a Greek god, that singled him out for notice among less favoured mortals, in nowise served to detract from the manliness of his appearance, by reason of their unusual beauty.

"If your face is as fair as a woman's, I'm blest if you haven't got a lion's strength!" a vanquished and professional boxer had once remarked to him. And the remark did not exceed the truth, for Herbert Carruthers

prided himself on being a good athlete, deficient neither in strength nor courage.

And to this man, with his great wealth and personal beauty, had been granted the fatal gift of creative power—the dreamy, sensitive poetic nature which, if it enables its owner to perceive visions of wondrous beauty where other eyes are blind, yet exposes him to the fiercest blasts of pain and suffering that may sweep over his finely-wrought and gifted soul.

Life had indeed been full of promise for Herbert Carruthers until Estella Raymond, the acknowledged belle and beauty of the season, had crossed his path.

Her piquant loveliness, graceful unconventionality and strangely fascinating manner, had gained her an easy victim in young Lord Carruthers.

He lavished upon her all the hoarded love that no other woman had succeeded in winning from him.

She had filled his life with fresh joy and gladness, and, in return, he sought to place every good gift that had fallen to his share at her disposal. He paid marked attention to her whenever they met in society; and Estella—proud to think that the man whose poems had been mentioned in the same breath with those of Tennyson and Browning, was among her admirers—graciously encouraged his advances, and, by so doing, filled his heart with hope.

Then he had put his fate boldly to the test and proposed to the idol of the hour, only to be rejected with a smile and a blush, and a few gently spoken words of dismissal.

Estella did not care for him in that way, but as a friend she should always value him, &c., &c.

He could not accept his disappointment as a man with a less sensitive nature, or a less enduring passion, would have done.

It had pierced him to the heart, and paralysed all his energies for the time being.

Life no longer possessed any active interest for him. He left town and went back to his

estate, to lead the quiet life of a country gentleman.

But the light had vanished from his eye, the gladness from his voice—while those who loved him dearly, who would gladly have given their lives for him had the need arisen, could only look sadly on at the havoc a woman's fickle, heartless conduct had wrought in his life.

Rupert Clitheroe, home from Calcutta—where his regiment was stationed—on leave of absence, had quickly detected the change in his friend's manner. Then, by dint of skilful questioning, he had contrived to extort a full explanation from him.

He was intensely sorry for Herbert Carruthers, and a feeling of anger gathered force in his breast as the result of Estella Raymond's conduct made itself visible in the young fellow's altered manner and gloomy uncertain moods. At the same time he could not extend to his friend the sympathy of a fellow-sufferer, for Rupert Clitheroe had never yet been in love.

He admired lovely woman from a purely æsthetic point of view; and, as a rule, they regarded with favourable eyes the bronzed young officer, with his dark, handsome face and grave, courteous bearing. But of love itself he knew absolutely nothing.

"You cannot be serious, Bertie, when you say this unlucky love affair has ruined your life," he replied, in answer to the other's passionate words. "You have been hit very hard, I'll admit, but so have other men, and they invariably get over it. Why, Teddy Jonquil, of ours, was going to put an end to his existence when a pretty girl, that he had fallen over head and ears in love with, married a yellow old general with a large fortune and the liver complaint. But he got over his trouble at last, and found that one woman doesn't make a world, any more than one swallow makes a summer. He's married now to a nice girl, who makes him a much better wife than the first would have done. Some day, Bertie, you too will be able to look back upon this episode in your life and smile at it."

But even as he spoke Rupert Clitheroe felt instinctively that the wound his friend had received from a woman's hand was a far more serious matter than light-hearted Teddy Jonquil's surface-scratch had been; one that would heal but slowly, if, indeed, it healed at all.

"I cannot forget her," said Herbert Carruthers, abruptly, as he paced to and fro the large drawing-room with restless strides. "I sometimes wish that I could do so, since to think of her as smiling in the old gracious manner upon some other man, consenting to become his wife when she refused to be mine, is almost enough to drive me mad! Rupert, it may be wrong, but there are times when I long for the quiet and the emancipation of death!"

"You must not allow such morbid ideas to get the mastery over you," said Rupert Clitheroe, reprovingly. "You have duties and responsibilities, too, that you ought not to shirk. You are the only male representative of the Carruthers family, remember; and it is the great wish of Lady Carruthers' heart that you should marry, and that your sons should perpetuate the good old name."

"My poor mother," remarked Herbert Carruthers, with a sad smile. "It pains me to destroy all her ambitious projects; but there is no help for it. I shall never marry, unless Estella Raymond consents to be my wife."

"Confound Estella Raymond!" growled Rupert Clitheroe. "She has bewitched you, I wish—"

But the announcement that Lord Carruthers' steward wished to see him for a few minutes on a matter of business snipped the young officer's wish in the bud.

Left to himself he wandered out into the flower-scented gardens to join Lady Carruthers and her daughters, who were giving some directions to the Scotch gardener.

Lady Carruthers was a tall, white-haired,

handsome woman, with a commanding, albeit kindly, manner. Time and care had placed but few wrinkles upon her smooth brow, although the anxiety and sorrow she had undergone on her son's account of late had told seriously upon her.

It was, indeed, the great wish of her life that her only son should marry well, and have children to succeed him. She would have welcomed a well-born daughter-in-law, even had she been poor, and have given up her own position as mistress of Castle Carruthers in favour of the bride with grateful willingness. But her plans had been shattered to the four winds by Estella Raymond, and she could only look on helplessly to see her son suffer.

If Lady Carruthers hated Estella, the feeling under the circumstances was a very pardonable one.

Norah Carruthers was a fair, pretty girl, with eloquent blue eyes, a small piquant nose, "tip-tilted like the petal of a flower," and a rosy mouth, round which a mischievous smile seemed always to linger.

"What do you think of Herbert?" she inquired, as she walked by Rupert's side in and out among the fragrant beds of leaf and bloom, while Lady Carruthers stayed behind to finish giving her instructions to the gardener.

"Is he likely to forget that woman, and to come back to his old self by degrees, Rupert?"

"I can hardly tell," Rupert replied, rather sadly. "Time can, and does, work wonders, Norah; but he takes this unlucky love affair of his very much to heart, and a nature so sensitive is slow to forget. It must be very dull work for you to be down here at present," he continued, compassionately. "You ought to be in town, now that the season is coming on."

"Mamma won't leave poor Bertie," said Norah; "and although Aunt Carrie would take me under her wing, it would seem heartless even to wish for pleasure just now, when he is so ill and unhappy. But the dullness is simply frightful! You will get tired of it in a day or two, Rupert, like everyone else who comes on a visit to the Castle. You will invent some important business that requires your immediate presence in town, and then—more in sorrow than in anger—we shall witness your departure."

Rupert Clitheroe laughed at the girl's despairing speech.

"I shall do nothing of the kind!" he said, decisively. "I want to rouse Bertie from the lethargy that has crept over him, and that will be a work of time. You will not get rid of me so quickly as you imagine. But I wish that you could have a few weeks in town, Norah."

"So do I," replied Norah, naively. "The happy people in town get the cream of every good thing, while we unfortunate creatures in the country have to put up with the skim milk. I can't even go to church on Sunday, Rupert, without being aware that the farmer's daughters, instead of listening to the sermon, are studying my attire with a view to matching it, and later on in the week I meet them gorgeously attired in an exaggerated version of my own dress or bonnet."

"You represent Paris to these country damsels, Norah," said her companion, with an irrepressible smile; "and you can hardly wonder that, in their anxiety to become acquainted with 'style' in its most recent form, they should select you as a model, since well-dressed girls are seldom to be met with in the neighbourhood of Castle Carruthers."

"Don't laugh, sir!" she replied, severely. "It is simply dreadful to be kept here in durance vile month after month. I shall not be able to bear it much longer, I'm certain! I've got a tricycle down from town, and there's some fun to be got from riding it about the lanes and through the village, in order to astonish the natives. It is the only relaxation that I can boast of. Let us talk about something else now," she continued, quickly; "for mamma is coming to join us, and I don't wish her to think that I am pining away, and wast-

ing my sweetness on the desert air. She has trouble enough to bear already!"

Rupert Clitheroe stayed at Castle Carruthers for nearly a month. At the end of that time he left the friends who had welcomed him so gladly in order to spend a portion of his leave of absence in London. His intention regarding Herbert Carruthers had, much to his disappointment, proved a complete failure.

Instead of recovering from the lethargy, the helpless indifference to every previous object of interest contained in his life, when in the society of his friend, the young poet became clearly more reserved and unapproachable. No hand, however strong and friendly, could lift the thick veil of sorrow, and restless longing that hung over him, no amount of affection could heal the ravages made by love.

CHAPTER II.

On the morning after Rupert Clitheroe's arrival in town, he found a dainty little note, written on scented paper, awaiting him when he came down to what must be described as a very late breakfast.

The note came from his cousin, Mrs. Sinclair, the only relative that the solitary man could boast of possessing.

Mrs. Sinclair's husband was a well-known London physician, who, in his secret heart, fully expected to receive the honour of knighthood ere long, in grateful recognition of the assistance he had rendered for many years past to suffering and fashionable humanity. They always gave Rupert a warm welcome to their house whenever he happened to be in town; and Mrs. Sinclair's note, which took a somewhat indignant and injured tone, ran as follows:—

"DEAR RUPERT,—
"Although you have not thought proper to inform me of your arrival in town I am aware of the same, thanks to Major Lennox, who saw you at the Club last night. Perhaps after having spent nearly a month with your friends, the Carruthers, you will be able to pass a few days with a relation. Why you should have decided to go to the Langham instead of coming to us as usual I cannot imagine. Should you care to alter your plans we have a room at your disposal; and we dine at seven to-night, in order to get things in readiness for the ball, at which you may like to be present, unless you have lost your old penchant for dancing, or a wish to avoid us altogether."

"Your affectionate cousin, EUNICE SINCLAIR."

"Perhaps I have not treated them very well this time," he reflected, with a momentary twinge of conscience, as he crumpled the angry pink note up in his hand. "They have always been kind to me; and Eunice is the only relation still remaining to prove that I am not quite alone in the world. The worst of staying with the Sinclairs is that they live in such a perpetual whirl of society; and here, in my own room, I can amuse myself after my own sweet will. I must leave them though, and take up my quarters with Eunice to-night, or there will be no end of a row. The ball will be an agreeable dissipation, coming after the long dull time spent at Castle Carruthers with poor Bertie."

So Captain Clitheroe's luggage was duly removed from the Langham to his cousin's house in Kensington Gore; and his arrival was announced to that lady as she sat in the smaller drawing-room, resting herself a little before the real hard work of the night, viz., the ball, should commence.

Mrs. Sinclair was a tall and rather pretty woman, bordering upon thirty. Both in her dress and surroundings she affected the æsthetic, somewhat to Rupert Clitheroe's amusement, since, although he was a lover of beauty, he cared little for the craze of the day, and gave it credit for idealizing ugliness far more often than anything else.

Mrs. Sinclair was dressed in long clinging robes of creamy white, gathered full beneath

her breast, and falling in graceful folds around her well-developed figure. Her brown hair was twisted into a thick coil and fastened high up on her head with a silver arrow, while serpent bracelets, wrought in silver, clasped her wrists, and a great fragrant white lily was fastened at her throat.

The walls of Mrs. Sinclair's rooms were hung with sage-green velvet wrought with lilies and sunflowers, while a subdued light came in through the exquisitely painted windows. Low-seated antique chairs of dark oak, with griffins and quaint designs carved upon them, stood about in various directions; statues of rare beauty gleamed from their abode pedestals, and flowering plants, arranged in artistic clusters, filled the air with their faint, sweet fragrance.

"How brown you are, Rupert!" Mrs. Sinclair remarked, after she had reprimanded her cousin for his tardy arrival, and received his laughing apology in return. "The climate of India has not done you much harm as yet, if appearances are to be relied upon. Don't you find the time dreadfully long when you are out there with your regiment?"

"Oh, we manage to extract some joy from existence, even in India," he replied lightly. "Thanks to picnics, balls, and an occasional tiger-hunt, we contrive to kill time, who will one day turn the tables by killing us. Life in India is not without its peculiar pleasures, Eunice."

"I am glad to hear that you get something to amuse you out there," said Mrs. Sinclair, looking critically at Rupert Clitheroe as she spoke, and feeling bound to admit that, although there was nothing aesthetic about him, he was an uncommonly handsome man. "Are your particular friends, the Carruthers, coming up to town this season, Rupert?"

"I think not," he replied carelessly; "they are going to lead wholesome country lives this year, instead of plunging into a vortex of town dissipation."

"How very tame!" Mrs. Sinclair exclaimed with a slight shrug of her shapely well-rounded shoulders. "I heard a rumour not long ago to the effect that Lord Carruthers had proposed to Miss Raymond, only to meet with a refusal. Do you know if there is really any foundation for it?"

"People generally keep their love affairs to themselves, cousin mine," he replied, with an air of provoking indifference. Not for worlds would Rupert Clitheroe have disclosed his friend's love affair, with all its unfortunate results, to this inquisitive woman. "Herbert Carruthers would not be likely to reveal such a delicate matter to me, or any other man living."

"Well, at any rate, he paid the most marked attentions to her last season," continued Mrs. Sinclair, "and he left town in a very abrupt manner before it was over. Doubtless, he fell a victim to Miss Raymond's numerous attractions. The knowledge that other men have shared the same fate may serve, in a measure, to console him for his own defeat."

"According to all accounts Miss Raymond must be a modern Circe, luring men on to destruction," Rupert replied, with a sudden frown.

"No one can deny that she is a very lovely girl," said Mrs. Sinclair, calmly. "She is quite the rage again this season. There are the 'Raymond bonnet' and the 'Raymond mantle'; and people are delighted when they can only secure her for one of their receptions, she is so much in request. But you will be able to interview her on your own account to-night, Rupert, since she is really coming to my ball."

"I am glad of it," he rejoined, with an angry sparkle in his clear, dark eyes the while. "What are the antecedents of this idol of society, Eunice? Are you acquainted with them?"

"Oh, yes, there is no mystery connected with them," said Mrs. Sinclair. "She is an orphan, brought up by an indulgent aunt and uncle to consider herself the centre of the universe,

round which everything else must revolve. She has a large fortune of her own, and, on this account, she can afford to be more independent than the majority of women, and less anxious to make a good match without loss of time. I expect she will aim at a title when she does consent to marry one of her numerous admirers. See, here is Edward!" she continued, with a smile. "He is coming to welcome the wanderer home again."

As Mrs. Sinclair uttered these words her husband, a short, stout man with a plain, clever face, and a frank, "jolly-good-fellow" sort of air about him, entered the room.

The greetings and explanations that followed his arrival served to fill up the short space of time still intervening before dinner was announced, and Rupert heard no further particulars respecting the popular Miss Raymond from his cousin that night.

Lights were gleaming, soft music was being played, and a sound of subdued talk and laughter floated through Mrs. Sinclair's crowded rooms four hours later on, but Miss Raymond had not arrived.

Rupert Clitheroe was fast losing all patience, when, after a tedious interval of waiting, her name was announced by the tall footman, and Estella Raymond entered the ball-room with the quiet grace and perfect ease of manner under the fire of many eyes that always distinguished her.

Rupert Clitheroe, looking intently at her, and scarcely noticing the richly-dressed elderly lady who accompanied her, was obliged to admit to himself, in spite of the preconceived dislike he entertained towards her, that she was by far the loveliest woman he had ever chanced to behold.

Estella Raymond was barely twenty, and yet her tall, slender form had all the rounded grace and symmetrical beauty of perfect womanhood.

Her eyes were large, dark, and limpid, with long, curving lashes, and a gleam in their shining depths as of starlight reflected in still waters.

Her complexion was perfect in its creamy pallor, while her golden hair, cut close to the small, proudly-carried head, and clustering in crisp, short waves round the well-formed ears and firm, white throat, added to the rare pigunt beauty that singled her out for special notice, even when other lovely women were present.

Dressed in robes of pale fleecy blue, with carelessly-twined wreaths of starry jessamine for her only ornament, Estella Raymond looked passing fair as she swept gracefully into Mrs. Sinclair's crowded ball-room; fair enough to win admiration, not altogether unmingled with envy, from those present, always excepting one solitary individual.

That individual was Rupert Clitheroe. Her wonderful dazzling beauty failed to produce a favourable impression upon him.

He recognized and acknowledged its existence, and yet he hated her for the heartless conduct, the cold, selfish indifference to pain in others, which had allowed her to blight the life and ruin the happiness of his dearest friend without a pang of remorse.

At the same time he was conscious of a longing to become better acquainted with the popular beauty, and to gain some insight into her real character.

"Eunice, I want you introduce me to Miss Raymond," he said, presently, when he had managed, with much tact, to get within speaking distance of his cousin. "If I don't cut in without loss of time those fellows who are hovering around her won't leave a single dance unclaimed."

Mrs. Sinclair willingly complied with his request, and Estella Raymond found herself in the act of being introduced to a tall, bronzed officer, with a dark, handsome face, and keen critical eyes that met hers with a glance that contained no admiration; only something that looked strangely like enmity, a quiet malice veiled under the usual courteous bearing of a gentleman towards a lady.

"And so you are Captain Clitheroe?" she remarked, pleasantly, as Rupert wrote his name down on her tablets for the next waltz. "You hardly seem like a stranger, I have heard of you so frequently from Mrs. Sinclair. Your gallant conduct during the Indian Mutiny made quite a hero of you, although the terrible event itself has become a thing of the past."

"I was but a 'griff' then," he replied, coldly; "and as I only did my duty, in common with many others, I cannot lay claim to any special distinction."

"True valour is always modest," Estella Raymond remarked, with a slight musical laugh; "and you form no exception to the general rule, Captain Clitheroe. Have you been long in town, or is this your first appearance upon the social boards since your return to England?"

"I only arrived yesterday," he replied; "and my cousin, Mrs. Sinclair, insisted upon my being present at the ball as a prelude to the other dissipation I shall have to take part in now that I am home again for awhile. I came to England nearly a month ago; but I have been spending my time, until yesterday, at Castle Carruthers."

"Castle Carruthers!" she repeated, quickly. "Is Lord Carruthers in town at the present moment, then?"

"No; I think he is going for a long cruise in his yacht, the *Snowflake*," replied Rupert Clitheroe, quietly. "We shall not see anything of him in town this season."

"What do you think of his poems?" she inquired, with a air of placid interest. "The critics have praised them up to the skies, and declare him to be the founder of a new school."

"Herbert Carruthers' poems are full of power and sweetness," he replied, gravely; "they are worthy of the noble mind that created them."

"You are among his admirers, then?" she remarked, with a smile.

"Herbert Carruthers is my dearest friend," he rejoined, somewhat haughtily; "and no one, enjoying the privilege of intimate acquaintance with him, could fail to like and respect him at the same time. Such a noble, sensitive, gifted nature must needs awaken the best and highest qualities and the affection of others, always supposing them to possess such desirable attributes."

She glanced at him for a moment as he uttered these words, with a timid, conscious look in her dark eyes, that drooped involuntarily beneath his answering gaze. Then the music commenced, and the waltz she had so graciously accorded to him brought the conversation to an end, much to her relief.

Rupert Clitheroe made no effort to secure Estella for his partner again that night. But he watched her keenly from a distance, with ever-increasing wonder and interest.

She did not appear to exercise any of the wiles and graces of an accomplished coquette; she was impartially bewitching and gracious in manner to the men who surrounded her, accepting their homage in the calmest possible manner as an ordinary thing to which she was well accustomed. She was eagerly sought for as a partner; and yet she gave more than one dance to an elderly ineligible, out of sheer kindness.

"She is no ordinary coquette," thought Rupert Clitheroe. "Herbert Carruthers would hardly have allowed himself to fall in love with a woman of that kind. She does not boast of her victims, as an Indian chief boasts of the scalps he has taken. But she is none the less dangerous, by reason of this distinction. She accepts homage and admiration unconsciously, as a flower sinks in the dew and the sunlight; and the absence of any studied attempt to please only adds to the fascination she is capable of exerting over the majority of men. My poor Bertie, it will be a hard matter to rescue you from the toils of this beautiful Circe!"

And Estella Raymond, on her way home from Mrs. Sinclair's ball, found her thoughts

constantly dwelling upon the bronzed, handsome young officer whose bearing towards her had been so reserved and distant; so free from the admiration and the homage that she loved.

"Why should I care to remember him?" she exclaimed, pettishly, as she nestled back among the cushions of the carriage. "He was formal and indifferent; he did not even ask for a second dance. I wonder if Herbert Carruthers has made a confidant of him, and, if so, what he thinks of me? At any rate, his opinion cannot affect me much, and I shall do my best to forget his existence."

And then, with all a woman's inconsistency, her thoughts, after a brief interval, returned to Rupert Clitheroe, as she sat opposite to her sleeping companion.

CHAPTER III.

RUPERT CLITHEROE and Estella Raymond were fated to become far more intimate with each other, and to meet very frequently in society after the introduction that had taken place between them at Mrs. Sinclair's ball.

At garden-parties, morning concerts, private theatricals, the opera and the race-course, Rupert Clitheroe found himself from time to time by the side of the reigning beauty who, let it be said to her credit, never allowed the word "professional" to be attached to her name.

He seized every possible opportunity for obtaining a better insight into her real character; he longed to ascertain beyond the shadow of a doubt if Estella Raymond was really the heartless being, the fair, pitiless Circe, that her conduct towards his friend might well justify him in deeming her.

Rupert Clitheroe was a keen student of human nature, but this woman's capricious and strangely complex disposition perplexed him sorely.

She seemed to accept adulation and homage freely from all quarters without, however, making any apparent effort to gain them. It was pleasant to her to be admired, and she could afford to be kindly and gracious to all her admirers, although by so doing she created hopes and longings that she had neither the desire nor the intention to satisfy. When admiration exceeded a certain limit, and straightway transformed itself into love, she was perfectly callous to the pain inflicted by means of a sweetly-worded refusal on men who, in more than one instance, had loved her not wisely but too well.

"Is she altogether selfish and heartless, I wonder!" he said to himself on the sunlit dusty Cup Day at Epsom, where he had been recognized and promptly taken possession of by a gay party of men and fashionable well-dressed women, among whom Estella Raymond shone supreme in a toilet that formed one of Worth's masterpieces. Those perfect lips of hers had just uttered a cynical jesting remark respecting a young Frenchman—a mere lad—who had been shot to the heart a few days before in a duel, which he had insisted upon fighting in order to avenge some real or fancied insult that had been offered to the woman he loved—the woman he had once fondly hoped to make his wife. Most people had a word of pity to bestow upon the dead boy, and Estella's unsympathetic cynical remark seemed strangely out of place.

Rupert Clitheroe was about to answer his own question with a decided negative when a gaunt, famished-looking woman came to the carriage door and asked for alms. The others, engaged in watching the horses then sweeping past, took no heed of her, but Estella Raymond leaned forward and placed a gold coin in the thin grimy hand outstretched to receive it, while Rupert Clitheroe's keen eyes did not fail to notice the little incident.

Later on, when lobster salad and Moselle were being freely discussed, a little cry from Estella, who sat next to him, attracted Rupert's attention.

"What is it?" he inquired, quickly.

"They have trampled on a dog," she said, excitedly, "over there in the crowd. See how he limps, poor brute, and tries to drag himself away on three legs. Oh, Captain Clitheroe, do save him, or he will be trodden underfoot again! I cannot bear to see a dog in pain."

It was the work of a moment for Rupert Clitheroe to leave the carriage and rescue the unfortunate mongrel that was getting the worst of it in the dense swaying crowd outside. Estella's white jewelled hands took the dog from him, and, for the first time in his life, that injured animal knew what it was to repose upon soft cushions, and lunch off dainty morsels of cold chicken.

"You are not altogether indifferent to pain and suffering then, Miss Raymond?" he remarked, with a sarcastic smile. "You can pity a starving beggar or a wounded dog, although a broken heart seems to wake but little sympathy upon you!"

"Because I believe that broken hearts are quickly mended," she replied, with a ripple of laughter in her voice. "Otherwise I fear that I should have a good deal to answer for. But you must have a very bad opinion of me, Captain Clitheroe, if you imagine me to be incapable of sympathising with suffering when it takes other forms. Sometimes I fancy that you entertain a profound dislike for me," she continued, merrily. "You certainly regarded me in a very stern manner on the occasion of our first meeting at Mrs. Sinclair's ball. I felt positively afraid of you that night! The coarseness of my own heart could hardly have looked more grim!"

"A dislike entertained towards you would, in the opinion of most men, entitle me to a lifelong residence in a *Maison de Santé*," he remarked, in the same jesting vein. "If I ever wish to arouse your sympathies on my own behalf, I shall get myself up as a broken-down showman, with a number of dogs in every stage of decrepitude, since you will not bestow pity or affection upon sufferers of another class, whose affliction comes under the more tragic heading of disappointed love."

Rupert Clitheroe was solely tried and perplexed in his effort to decipher the real character of the capricious lovely woman who had refused to listen to his friend's wooing, although for a time she had thoughtlessly allowed and encouraged his attentions, who laughed at the idea of broken hearts, and who could yet display ready compassion when the physical sufferings of a beggar or a dog were in question.

But had he possessed the power of reading Estella Raymond's secret thoughts he would have been far more astonished and perplexed.

For the first time in her life Estella knew the meaning of love—the passionate, all-absorbing love that comes but once in a lifetime, and which, should it chance to be unreciprocated, can never flourish and bear leaf and blossom again.

And the man who had wrought this great change in her life, who had lifted the drooping brows and raised the sleeping soul beneath them, had done it unconsciously, and knew nothing of the conquest he had gained without so much as an effort or a wish.

Estella Raymond would have found it difficult to explain why she had fallen suddenly in love with Rupert Clitheroe, the only man of her acquaintance who had made no attempt to produce a favourable impression upon her, or to win his way into her good graces. Perhaps the very fact of his indifference may have piqued her, and helped to arouse the love that she experienced for him.

This love, with the deep, tumultuous joy that accompanied it for a time, tended to soften and improve her nature more than any other force that had ever swayed it.

Her ambitious dreams and longings, the title and the princely establishment that had once figured so largely in her ideas of marriage, gave way now to a less ambitious, but a far more tenderly and womanly ideal of two

lives welded into one by the power of love, finding their deepest joy in the mystical union of one soul with another—the union that neither rank nor riches can produce or destroy.

Rupert Clitheroe was not a vain man, and it did not occur to him to think when Estella smiled graciously upon him, and allowed him to scrawl his name down upon her programme for any number of dances, or to sit next to her at play or opera, that she was giving him any special encouragement.

He had a great dislike for her—at least he honestly believed that he had—and this real or supposed dislike helped to increase his blindness to the true state of affairs.

His cousin, the æsthetic Mrs. Sinclair, was the first to open his eyes, and let a flood of light in upon his astonished soul.

"Rupert," she began, solemnly, as they sat together in the drawing-room one evening after dinner—the doctor being absent on a professional visit—"what do you think of Miss Raymond? You have known her long enough now to be able to form an opinion."

"She is a beautiful woman," he replied, from the depths of the easy-chair, in which he had installed himself; "but there is something in her manner that I don't like. She reminds me of those sirens of old whose sweet voices lured men to their death, and who used to exult over their victims when once they were fairly caught! Norah Carruthers is more to my taste than a stately beauty like Miss Raymond."

"I am surprised at your want of good taste in preferring Norah Carruthers to Miss Raymond," said Mrs. Sinclair, reprovingly. "They differ just as a wild hedge-flower differs from a lovely hothouse plant. Speaking seriously, Rupert, you cannot be ignorant of the reason that has induced Miss Raymond to become as intimate with us of late. Why, at one time I could hardly secure her for an occasional ball or dinner-party; now she accepts all my invitations, and takes care that we are invited to her aunt's house in return. You know the motive for her changed conduct as well as I do myself."

"Indeed, I don't!" he said with a careless laugh. "You give me credit for more penetration than I really possess, Eunice. I care so little for Miss Raymond that her proceedings fail to interest me."

"Then you are a blind, ungrateful wretch, and you don't deserve the good fortune that has fallen to your share!" related his cousin in a tone of vigorous indignation that had nothing æsthetic about it. "Rupert, that girl cares for you as she has never cared for any other man before. I'm certain of it, for I've watched her keenly when you have been together lately, and I know that you have only to propose to her in order to be accepted."

"Eunice! you must be crazy to say such a thing!" he exclaimed, sitting bolt upright in his great astonishment. "Is it likely that Miss Raymond, a beauty as well as an heiress, would allow herself to fall in love with a poor devil of an officer who has only his pay to depend upon?"

"At any rate, there is method in my madness," Mrs. Sinclair replied with an air of calm triumph. "People cannot always decide with whom they are to fall in love, Rupert, since love is fond of assuming the imperative mood, and shaping its own course. Propose to her, and you will find my idea to be perfectly correct."

"But I don't even wish to propose to her," he returned, sharply. "I dislike her so much that, were I compelled to decide between Miss Raymond and your housemaid I should choose the latter."

"Then you are in love with another woman," said Mrs. Sinclair, dejectedly. "How cruelly unfortunate with such a good match within reach!"

"No, I am perfectly heart-whole, Eunice," he replied, with a provoking smile.

"In that case, you cannot surely be in earnest when you speak so lightly of Miss Ray-

mond's decided predilection in your favour?" she continued, earnestly, with renewed hope. "Why, men belonging to the first families in the land have offered themselves to her, only to be refused. She is both rich and lovely, and yet you—a poor captain in a line regiment—can afford to let such a prize slip by when it is fairly within your grasp! If you don't love her you might at least have an eye to your own interests in making her your wife. People do not *always* marry for love."

"Oh, Eunice, what a worldly-minded woman you are!" he exclaimed, with well-feigned horror. "I shall tell Sinclair when he comes home that you have been trying to lead my innocent, unsuspecting steps astray. I certainly shall not be mean enough to marry a woman I dislike in order to avail myself of her money. I would sooner carve out my own fortune with my sword."

"Then you deserve to live and die a captain, since such ungrateful, unreasonable conduct ought not to go unpunished!" said Mrs. Sinclair, hotly, sweeping past him as she spoke with a look of withering scorn on her fair face.

All her plans for her cousin's welfare had been defeated by means of his inexplicable perversity, and she felt both astonished and angry at the unexpected result of her diplomatic venture.

Left to himself, Rupert Clitheroe made his way to Dr. Sinclair's smoking-room. Establishing himself 'at the open window with a cigar and a brandy-and-soda, he thought long and earnestly over the startling news that had just been imparted to him.

He mentally decided that he was neither pleased nor flattered by reason of the affection that such a lovely woman as Estella Raymond was supposed to entertain for him. Mrs. Sinclair's words had made his heart beat quickly and sent the blood coursing madly through his veins; but then she had taken him by surprise, and a little calm reflection would enable him to decide how to act for the best, since reason predominated over almost every other force in his cool, well balanced, intellectual nature.

His dislike for Estella Raymond was deeply rooted, and he had even sworn to punish her for the misery she had inflicted upon his dearest friend, should an opportunity for doing so ever occur. As he sat there in the dark, smoking and thinking, a plan of revenge, delicate, subtle and deadly, worked itself out in his active mind.

He would allow things to go on as they were for the present. He was far too honourable a man to simulate the love that he did not feel, but he would still continue to meet Estella Raymond from time to time in society, trusting to some chance word or look to reveal the real state of things, and bring the hidden truth to the surface.

Then, with the love that so many men had sought in vain to win, and placed at his disposal, with reserve and concealment at an end between them, he would possess a weapon capable of inflicting sharper and more exquisite pain than Estella had ever inflicted upon his one treasured friend—the friend whose wrong he must, in all consistency, endeavour to avenge.

Dr. Sinclair's return roused him at length from a reverie the reverse of pleasant.

"This is rather dull work for you, old fellow," said the cheery little man, as he lit a cigar. "It is seldom that we happen to be quite without an engagement of some kind."

"I have not found the time long," Rupert replied, with an abstracted air. "I have been thinking, Sinclair."

"Thinking, eh!" replied the doctor, who dearly loved a joke at someone else's expense; "that is a most unusual occupation for one belonging to your profession to indulge in, isn't it, Rupert? It's too much to expect from a man that he should think and fight as well. Now I'm willing to bet ten to one that the subject of your meditation was a woman."

Rupert could not deny the soft impeachment.

"The next surmise is that you are in love, and that we shall have a wedding on our hands by-and-by," continued the Doctor, with a sly twinkle in his small, dark eyes. "That will just please Eunice. Women love to arrange somebody else's wedding when they know that their own is a settled affair."

"Do you imagine that a man's thoughts about a woman must always be more or less connected with love?" inquired Rupert Clitheroe, quietly.

"Well, no, not always, my dear boy—not always," replied the little man, briskly. "For instance, how many different shades of feeling, ranging from passionate devotion to deepest hatred, are contained between those feminine North Poles, or man's first love and his mother-in-law? But at your age, Rupert, when meditations respecting the fair sex occupy the masculine mind, love generally comes uppermost."

CHAPTER IV.

THE London season had passed its meridian and was slowly drawing to a close, amid a whirl of gaiety that seemed only to increase as the time in which it could yet be enjoyed grew shorter. People were beginning to think of the sea-side, the moors, or the breezy mountains, and to make their plans for leaving town as soon after Goodwood as possible.

The season had been an unusually brilliant one, and Belgravian mammas were in many instances able to congratulate themselves on having obtained the much-desired *parti* for the pretty daughter who formed the stock-in-trade of their matrimonial market, thus enabling them to rest on their oars for awhile, free from anxiety, since the angling for gold fish had been so successful.

The season had also held many fresh triumphs for Estella Raymond. It had brought her several good offers. She was still the reigning beauty, since no rival capable of throwing her rare loveliness into the shade had come forward; and yet, in spite of these advantages, the end of the season found her feeling restless, dissatisfied, and unhappy.

Her path had, until lately, been strewn with rose leaves; no desire had been left ungratified, no joy untasted. She had accepted the good things of life as they came to her, and enjoyed them to the full; while such grim spectres as sorrow and disappointment were never allowed to find their way into the cloudless, smiling Eden of her existence.

But since she had become aware of her growing love for Rupert Clitheroe, a great deal of the careless, unreflecting enjoyment had died out of her life. Love, sweet-voiced, light-footed, beautiful love, frequently brings some very ugly companions with him, such as anxiety, suspense, and even jealousy itself; and Estella Raymond was already beginning to acknowledge the undeniable truth contained in this statement, thanks to the sharp teaching of personal experience.

Others had flattered and praised her, others had eagerly sought her out, and accepted the least encouragement she deigned to offer them with gratitude. Men with both fortune and title at their disposal had endeavoured to win her in marriage, only to meet with a decided refusal. But the one man who—had he come forward like the rest—would have met with a gracious reception from the capricious beauty, kept coldly aloof from her, and allowed no word of love to cross his lips.

It was mortifying to Estella's pride, as well as being painful to her heart, to think that Rupert Clitheroe, the man to whom she was passionately in love, should remain insensible to the slight, but evident marks of approval and favour that she had from time to time bestowed upon him.

Not for one moment, however, did she imagine that he had perceived these favourable symptoms—these delicate hints that he was not really an object of indifference to her, and

coldly disregarded them, owing to a want of love for the fair giver. She was too much accustomed to look upon herself as the centre around which other things and people naturally revolved, too deeply blinded by the incense of flattery and adulation to entertain such a far-fetched idea as this.

Rupert Clitheroe, she told herself, was reserved and diffident. His poverty rendered him proud, and fearful of putting his fate to the test. She had but to make her meaning a little plainer in order to bring him to her feet, full of gratitude for the bewildering happiness, the immense favour, which had conferred upon him.

But the season was fast drawing to a close, and no understanding had taken place between them. In the course of a few weeks both would leave town, and circumstances might combine to keep them apart for years, since Rupert Clitheroe was only home on leave, and he had more than once alluded to the time when he must rejoin his regiment.

A sharp stab of mingled fear and sorrow pierced Estella's heart as she contemplated the idea of drifting hopelessly away from the man she loved without the explanation, the mutual avowal of love which she so ardently desired and longed for.

And Rupert Clitheroe, meeting her so frequently in society, could not fail to remark the womanly softness, the subdued and almost pensive manner, that served to add a fresh charm to her rare, piquant loveliness. There were times when—perceiving this change in her for the better—his resolution well nigh failed him, and he told himself that she was but a woman, and, on that account, he must not deal too harshly with her.

His old dislike for Estella Raymond was losing its keen edge, and becoming a blunt weapon, incapable of striking a deadly blow.

But Norah Carruthers's sad little letters, coming soon after these weak moments, were the unconscious means of making him despise himself, for the inclination in the direction of mercy and forbearance that sometimes overcame him when in Estella Raymond's presence.

Herbert was no better, Norah informed her brother's friend from time to time. They had persuaded him to go abroad; but the same air of listless dependency clung to him wherever they went, and his health was fast breaking up, owing to the quietly-borne, but constant mental suffering that oppressed him, and which he made not the slightest effort to shake off.

When Rupert Clitheroe read these letters, he told himself that forgiveness is sometimes only the product of a shallow mind and a short memory—that he would be playing the traitor to his friend were he to entertain any gentle thoughts of the beautiful woman who had injured him so deeply.

He met Estella one night, quite at the end of the season, at a crowded ball. Lady Milford, the hostess, always reserved something good for the extreme end, as a kind of set-piece when the ordinary fireworks were over. The music, the refreshments, the decorations were known to be of the best; and no matter how warm the weather chanced to be, she seldom received any refusals.

Rupert Clitheroe, after dancing with Miss Raymond, led her into the cool, pleasant conservatory, with a strange consciousness upon him as he did so that a crisis was close at hand.

Estella sank down upon a velvet lounge, placed behind a thick bank of tropical plants, that scented the air with their rich, sweet fragrance, and fanned herself with an air of relief.

"It is so cool and quiet out here," she remarked, lifting her dark, liquid eyes to Rupert Clitheroe's stern, troubled face, as she spoke. "I am glad that the season, with its perpetual whirl of pleasure, will soon be over again for a while. I doubt if we enjoy ourselves half as much as the mechanic, who has to save up so long beforehand for his one day"

outing, and who enters into his brief space of pleasure so heartily when it comes."

"You should not bring complaints against a season that has secured you so many fresh triumphs, Miss Raymond," he replied, with a smile full of quiet meaning.

Estella shrugged her pretty, well-rounded shoulders disdainfully.

"You allude to the offers I have received, and the compliments that have been paid to me, Captain Clitheroe," she said, frankly. "I attach but little value to either. They do not compensate me for the fashionable treadmill upon which I have to spend a certain number of months every year, in common with many other sufferers. I am positively longing for fresh air, freedom and mountain scenery."

"And yet a queen loves to receive homage from all her subjects," said Rupert Clitheroe, in a tone of covert sarcasm. "You accept their homage as a matter of course, it is true; but you would not like them to fail in their duty."

"Captain Clitheroe, I think you are very unkind to me!" she exclaimed, quickly, a brilliant flush tinging the creamy pallor of her face as she spoke. "Do you suppose that any amount of social success can satisfy a woman's heart? It may please and gratify her for a time; but nothing short of love itself can render her life really a happy one."

"And yet, only a little while ago, you jested at love, and put ambition in the first place," he reminded her, gravely. "Love, according to your account, was only fit to wear the fool's cap and bells."

"Fresh experiences may engender fresh opinions," she replied, with a little tremulous laugh, while her white bosom rose and fell quickly under the influence of the intense agitation that possessed her. "If I have been a free thinker, where love is concerned, I am coming back to the orthodox belief again."

"But you are a queen!" he said, coldly; "and, although all may offer homage to a queen, few dare to speak to her of love."

"He who really feels it will dare, in spite of all risks to avow it!" she remarked, in a tone of intense passionate meaning; "and he need fear no repulse, since when love meets love, the need for either concealment or suspense is at an end."

Rupert Clitheroe regarded her as she uttered these words with calm, questioning eyes.

"Am I to infer from your words that I am not altogether an object of indifference to you, Miss Raymond?" he inquired, after a brief pause.

His frigid manner, and the absence of any real warmth and interest in his voice, were unnoticed by Estella. She only heard the question that served to fill her heart with such a tumult of joy and gladness.

"You have never been an object of indifference to me," she replied, slowly, with averted glance. "I have loved you from the time of our first meeting at Mrs. Sinclair's ball."

Estella's beautiful golden head drooped as she uttered this confession, while her dark, liquid eye shone with the soft light of love and intense happiness. She was so near to him that Rupert Clitheroe could easily have gathered the fair, yielding form to his breast; but he stood apart, under the shadow of a gigantic tropical plant, with a still deeper shadow falling over his bronzed, handsome face.

"Miss Raymond, what you have just said would be sufficient to fill most men with delight," he began, with dearly bought composure; "but I have no desire to avail myself of the love that you are generous enough to entertain for me, or to accept the encouragement contained in your words. I think it will be best for us not to pursue the subject any further."

Estella Raymond glanced up at him with wide-open, startled eyes. Had he struck her she could scarcely have felt more astonished.

"Captain Clitheroe, I do not understand!"

she said, brokenly, with an involuntary movement of her white hands.

"Must I pain you by putting my meaning into words a second time?" he replied, harshly. "I cannot accept or reciprocate affection coming from you, Miss Raymond, although I am able to esteem it at its true value, since I know what other men have endured in the vain effort to obtain it."

This time Estella could not fail to understand the full meaning of his words, while a feeling of unutterable shame and sudden anger took possession of her as she did so.

More than one peer of the realm had proposed to her, only to be rejected. Now she herself had been calmly set aside by the only man that she had permitted herself to love, and that man was but a penniless officer. Could she, by any chance, have fallen into a deeper abyss of pain and humiliation? she wondered, vaguely.

"It would only have been kind to inform me that you were not free, that you were pledged to some other woman, a little sooner, before I had uttered words that I would give the world to be able to recall," she said, passionately.

"In that case I should have told you a falsehood," he replied, steadily; "for I have never loved any woman in the way you allude to."

"Then why permit me to say so much only to meet with a humiliating repulse?" she inquired, in a tone of quiet anguish that affected Rupert Clitheroe far more than a burst of passionate indignation would have done. "Why have you treated me so cruelly, Captain Clitheroe? You have not acted thus without a motive."

"No, I have not been aimlessly cruel," he replied, quietly. "Am I to blame if I have compelled you to suffer a little of the pain which you have so often inflicted upon others? Miss Raymond, have you already forgotten Herbert, Lord Carruthers?"

She started perceptibly at this mention of a familiar name, and vainly sought to read Rupert Clitheroe's meaning from his impassive face.

"Why do ask me this question?" she said, haughtily. "Lord Carruthers is nothing to me. Why should I keep him specially in remembrance?"

"You encouraged him with the hope that he might one day become far nearer and dearer to you, though," continued Rupert Clitheroe. "Then, when you grew tired of him you threw him over and refused to accept the love he was so eager to lavish upon you. You have robbed his life of all the glad promise it once contained; you have made an old man of him before his time. Such heartless conduct must needs recoil upon yourself, sooner or later, and bring its own punishment."

A sudden gleam of intelligence flashed from Estella's dark eyes.

"You told me once that Lord Carruthers was your dearest friend," she said, quickly. "Have you taken upon yourself the task of avenging his wrongs, Captain Clitheroe?"

"I swore that I would do so should an opportunity occur," he replied, hoarsely. "Heaven knows the task has been a hard one, but I could not play the traitor to my friend by accepting the love which he sought for in vain, and which has brought him well-nigh to the brink of the grave."

"You do not mean to say that he is dying?" Estella exclaimed, with a moan of terror in her voice.

"He is not likely to live long under the constant pressure of a great sorrow," continued her companion. "Women can either make or mar the life of a sensitive genius like Herbert Carruthers. They can help him to win a great name, or they can rob him of all power and energy, and break the flute that might, under the touch of a gentle hand, have given music so 'piercing sweet' to the world. You have come between Carruthers and the joy and the fame that might otherwise have been his. Can you wonder, then, if I, his

friend, feel both angry and sorrowful when I think of his wasted life and happiness?"

She made no reply, but sat there motionless, with bowed head, while the music from the ball-room floated towards them in faint, far-off strains of exquisite sweetness.

"I must go back now," she remarked, after awhile, rising from her seat with the air of one but newly awakened from sleep. "or my aunt will begin to wonder at my long absence. Captain Clitheroe, the result of this interview will, I presume, remain a secret between us." "Most decidedly," was the reply. "The question was hardly necessary or fair towards me, Miss Raymond."

"I know I can trust to your sense of honour," she said, wearily, as they returned to the ball-room. "If I have really inflicted pain and suffering on Lord Carruthers you have not allowed him to remain unavenged."

CHAPTER V.

FOR a man who had gained his point, and been successful in wounding the heart and humiliating the proud spirit of the woman against whom his enmity had been so long directed, Rupert Clitheroe enjoyed but a small share of satisfaction.

Far from feeling either triumphant or elated at the victory he had won over Estella Raymond, he was conscious of a feeling of intense remorse whenever his thoughts went back, as they so frequently did, to the scene that had taken place in Lady Mildaur conservatory on the night of the grand ball, and in which Estella and himself had been the only actors—remorse not altogether unmingled with reproach, and vain, passionate longing.

He had spurned her timidly proffered love, and reproached her for the capricious, unfeeling conduct she had displayed towards his friend, Lord Carruthers. But he had really done it less from a feeling of hatred, a desire for revenge, than in the desperate effort to remain true to his first resolve, and consistent in conduct towards his friend at the same time.

Constant intercourse with Estella Raymond, and a better insight into her character, had done much to weaken the enmity, the bitter dislike, that he had once entertained for the lovely girl whose charms had produced such a disastrous effect upon Lord Carruthers. Inch by inch he had steadily lost ground, until, when the moment for decisive action arrived, Rupert Clitheroe had been obliged to carry out his preconceived plan of revenge with scarcely any of the active dislike, the longing for retaliation, that had prompted him in the first instance.

"Perhaps, after all, I should have shown more common sense had I left Carruthers to fight his own battles," he reflected, moodily, as he packed his portmanteau, and prepared for a speedy departure from London, which had suddenly grown hateful to him. "It is one thing to go to a fellow's assistance when he is getting the worst of it in a school mill, it's quite another thing to interfere when he's grown up and there is a woman in question. She can't be altogether bad and self-centred, for I behaved like a brute to her in my effort not to play the traitor to Carruthers, and she uttered no word of reproach, she did not even give me so much as an angry look. I wish from my soul that she had, for, in that case, I should hardly feel so conscience-stricken, or look upon my own conduct with such unmitigated disgust as I do at present. Bertie is a dear old fellow, and I would give my life for him should such a melodramatic event as the fact of his requiring it ever come to pass; but friendship may sometimes require from us a sacrifice or an effort far more difficult to grant than life itself."

And, as he wrestled with the things in his portmanteau, carelessly allowing such dangerous commodities as ink and majesties to nestle in the folds of his best shirt, Estella Raymond's pale, sorrowful face, and dark eyes gleaming with unshed tears, as he had last

seen them on the night of the ball, seemed to float constantly before him, adding considerably to the confused, unpleasant, remorseful state of mind from which he was quite unable to free himself.

He had previously ascertained from his cousin, Mrs. Sinclair, that Miss Raymond and her aunt had left town and gone abroad, without leaving any more definite address than "Poste Restante, Venice," behind them. They would doubtless remain on the Continent, travelling from place to place, for some months to come, and he would thus be spared the embarrassment of another meeting with the woman he had virtually refused to marry.

But this reflection, oddly enough, gave him more pain than pleasure. Far from trying to hasten his return to India, in order to put the ocean between them, he had managed to effect an exchange with another officer, which would enable him to remain in Europe for nearly two years to come. He could not account even to himself for this sudden change of mind, he only felt that, after what had occurred, a return to India would be like leaving the most important chapter in his life in an unfinished and unsatisfactory condition.

He completed his packing, and started for the North of Scotland on the next day, in company with Archie Campbell, a briefless young barrister, for whom pleasure in any shape or form possessed more charms than hard work. Campbell owned a tumble-down tower and some acres of ground near Bendeary, in the heart of the North Highlands. The tower could offer little more accommodation than the ruined residence of the ill-fated master of Ravenswood itself, and its owner had no Caleb Baulderstone, ready and willing to tell white lies in order to save his master's credit in the eyes of strangers. But he could at least offer some capital sport to his friends in town, and whenever he visited his paternal acres, as he jestingly called them, he seldom went alone.

But Rupert Clitheroe's keen love of sport had suddenly deserted him just when it was most in request, and lonely Bendeary, that possessed no other attraction, seemed well-nigh hateful to him. He grumbled at the weather, the gillies, and the general dullness, until Archie Campbell, one of the best-natured fellows going, almost felt inclined to wish that he had selected a more cheerful companion to share his solitude.

"I tell you what it is, Clitheroe," he said, one day, when they were tramping over the hills together; "you're in love, and you've taken the complaint badly. I can recognize the symptoms, since I have more than once endured them on my own account. Who is she, and when did it all occur? You may unburden yourself as freely to me as to a father-confessor."

"You're an idiot, Campbell!" he retorted, savagely, but with a startled ring in his voice, as if his own dim surmises and vague misgivings had suddenly been clothed in words. "I am far too practical to go in for sentimental woes of any description; only this place is so confoundedly dull after the whirl of town life that it gives one the blues now and then. There, the mist is closing in again, and we may as well go home. Your beloved Scotland enjoys a delightful climate, truly; when it doesn't rain its foggy, or the wind blows great guns."

"I'm afraid this mist will be some time before it rises," said Campbell, consolingly; "and until it does, we shall be compelled to confine our sporting proclivities to the rats that inhabit the lower portion of the tower."

"Books are out of the question, I suppose?" remarked Rupert Clitheroe, with a groan. "The name of Mudie has never penetrated to this uncivilized region."

"Well, no," replied his friend; "but I have a few standard works in my room, that I always fall back upon when the weather is bad. They are like old friends, and should Scott fall upon you, and Dickens himself be-

come wearisome, why Lamb is always in season."

The mist did last, more or less, for several days; and Rupert was fast growing tired of Scotland, its climate and its fare, when a note reached him from Lord Carruthers, and he welcomed it almost as eagerly as Noah did the dove with the olive branch.

"We are all staying at Lanterbrannen," ran the note, "and the weather here is glorious. If you have had enough of Scotland by this time, you had better make up your mind to join us without delay and bring Campbell with you. I have some news for you—but it will keep until your arrival."

"Who is your correspondent?" inquired Archie Campbell, with mild curiosity.

"Lord Carruthers," replied Rupert. "He wants us both to join him at Lanterbrannen. Suppose we put our traps together and go?"

"I'm quite agreeable," said the young barrister. "And since Scotland does not seem to agree with you very well this time, we'll start to-morrow."

A cordial greeting awaited the two young men at Lanterbrannen, a pretty Swiss village not far from Interlaken. The Carruthers, mother, son, and daughter, had taken up their abode there for the present, preferring it to the more frequented haunts.

Rupert Clitheroe, gazing intently at his friend, knew at once that some great joy had come into his life since their last meeting, and blotted out every trace of past suffering. The listless, absent manner, the indifference to all that was passing around him, had entirely vanished. The light had returned to his eye, the glad ring to his voice, while Lady Carruthers had lost the careworn look that had previously clouded her fine face. "What had occurred," Rupert asked himself, wondering, to effect such an unlooked-for change?

He was not allowed to remain long in a state of uncertainty respecting the cause of it all. While Norah and Lady Carruthers entertained Archie Campbell with a graphic description of their recent travels, Herbert Carruthers slipped his arm within that of his friend, and led him out through the open window into the pleasant moonlight.

"Come and have a cigar, Rupert," he said, by way of excuse, and then, when they were quite out of earshot, he stood still and placed his hand on Rupert Clitheroe's shoulder. "Rupert, old boy, what do you think has happened since we were last together?" he said, in a tone of exultant gladness.

"Something good, I should imagine, if one may form an opinion from the decided change for the better in your own appearance," replied his friend, with a smile. "You are getting over your disappointment at last, Bertie."

"What will you say when I tell you that the disappointment no longer exists, that Estella Raymond has consented to become Lady Carruthers?" he continued, in the same strain of heart-felt happiness.

"What has induced Miss Raymond to revoke her previous decision?" inquired Rupert Clitheroe, abruptly, a dull pain or sense of lifelong isolation and regret settling down upon him as he spoke.

"How can I tell?" replied Herbert Carruthers. "I only know that—finding her here—I ventured to put my fate to the test a second time, and was accepted. Rupert, you who have never been in love, cannot tell how dear this woman is to me, or what a wealth of joy has suddenly flooded my life."

"Do you mean to say that Miss Raymond is here, in Lanterbrannen, at the present moment?" he inquired, with a startled air.

"Yes," continued Lord Carruthers. "She is staying here with her aunt. They are not at the hotel, but at a pension kept by a widow lady. She is unusually gentle and affectionate in manner; so much altered, indeed, that were such a thing not extremely improbable, I should be inclined to think that some great sorrow had passed over her, and left a good effect behind. Now, Rupert, where are your congratulations?"

"You know they are yours already," said Rupert, rather unsteadily. "It is hardly necessary for me to put them into words. On your account I am glad that you are about to marry Estella Raymond, for you deserve to be happy. I wish—"

"They are calling us," said Carruthers, as Norah's voice was borne towards them on the still night air.

"Go back, and see what they want," replied the other, quickly. "I am going to take a stroll round the village, and you can come after me when you like."

He longed to be alone in order that he might the more freely commune with his own soul, and still the conflicting emotions that struggled for the mastery in his breast.

Estella Raymond had promised to become the wife of his friend. The love she once had timidly offered to himself, and which he had been senseless enough to refuse, in all probability existed no longer. A great barrier had risen between them, shutting out all hope of possible change or explanation. Oh, fool, fool, fool! Why had the love that now filled his heart with such pain and longing—the love that Herbert Carruthers' words had so rudely awakened, never to sleep again—why had it not prompted him to act differently while yet the opportunity was his?

A perfect agony of regret and bitter self-reproach swept over him as he walked heedlessly on, alive only to the one cruel fact, that the woman he loved was lost to him for ever, thanks to his own mad, pitiless decision in the past.

Had she consented to marry Herbert Carruthers from motives of pity and generosity, since he had suffered so much on her account; or had ambition, and a proud desire to show that she was not grieving over the past, influenced her at all in the matter?

If he could but once find her alone, that he might ask her forgiveness for his cruel, mistaken conduct, and establish a better understanding between them for the future!

Rupert Clitheroe had no wish, now that things had gone so far, to play the traitor to his friend, or to undermine his happiness; though had his love for Estella revealed itself to him earlier in the day, he could hardly have been expected to exert so much self-sacrifice. As it was, he became conscious of a great longing to see Estella again, not in society, surrounded by other people, but by herself, that he might plead for the forgiveness he so ardently desired to obtain.

Some wishes are doomed never to be realised, others are scarcely conceived ere they gain their fulfilment.

Rupert Clitheroe, absorbed in thought, had reached the outskirts of the little village without knowing it. On turning a sharp corner he found himself close to a rough wooden bridge, thrown from rock to rock, while a cascade rushed swiftly down into the dark abyss below.

A woman with a slender, graceful form stood upon the bridge, gazing down at the foaming, silvery waters. As she turned quickly round, on hearing the sound of footsteps, an expression of surprise escaped involuntarily from Rupert Clitheroe's lips on finding himself face to face with Estella Raymond.

CHAPTER VI.

ESTELLA certainly had the best of it in that unexpected meeting with Rupert Clitheroe on the little wooden bridge overhanging the cascade. She was perfectly calm and self-possessed, while Rupert seemed to have entirely lost the *sang froid*, the easy, unembarrassed manner that had carried him safely through so many trying scenes, and to have become nervous, hesitating, and uncertain how to act for the best.

Perhaps she saw this, and determined, from a feeling of compassion, to take the initiative. At any rate, she held out her white, jewelled hand to him as they stood there, with the silvery moonlight transforming and beautify-

ing every object around them, while a faint smile illumined her lovely face.

"This is an unexpected meeting, Captain Clitheroe," she remarked, in a tone that was pleasant and courteous, but very odd. "Lord Carruthers told me that you were to join him here, but I did not think you would arrive upon the scene so soon after your letter."

"I was tired of Scotland," he replied, abruptly, "and only too glad to avail myself of an excuse for leaving it. I did not expect to find you here, Miss Raymond."

"Oh, Aunt Marjory and I have been here for nearly three weeks," she said, lightly. "We look upon ourselves as old inhabitants, and the place is so lovely that we feel no desire to leave it."

"Do you think it is safe to wander about by yourself at night?" he inquired, after an embarrassing pause in the conversation, during which his thoughts had not been at all complimentary to his own course of action in the past, as his eyes rested upon Estella's pure, pale face and golden hair, framed in the light, fleecy shawl that she had thrown over her head as a precaution against the night air, before setting out on her solitary ramble.

"I am not nervous," she replied, simply, "and the house is very near. But the rooms were unbearably hot, and a red-haired youth was doing his best at the piano to murder 'Nancy Lee,' so I came here for the sake of getting fresh air and quietness."

They had moved off the bridge by this time, and were standing back in the shadow of the dusky, fragrant pine trees, while the mountains, like hoary monarchs, each with his diadem of snow, towered grandly up in the distance.

"I hardly know how to put my meaning into words without offending you," Rupert Clitheroe began, standing bareheaded before her in the moonlight, with the great, newly-discovered passion in his heart yearning and striving to break through the barrier of self-control, the sense of what was due to his friend, with which he sought to restrain it; "but if my presence here is at all painful or displeasing to you, Miss Raymond, I will invent some excuse to account for my speedy departure. When I agreed to join Carruthers here I knew nothing of the engagement so recently formed between you, neither was I aware that I should be fortunate enough to meet you in Switzerland; I thought you were travelling in quite another direction. You have but to say the word, however, and I will leave Lauterbrunnen."

"Pray do not allow any consideration for me to influence you in staying here or going away," she replied, with calm hauteur; "and I do not see why you should think it necessary to apologise to me for having come. I do not object to your presence; indeed, as Lord Carruthers' dearest friend, I am in duty bound to welcome you!"

He understood the meaning contained in her carefully chosen words only too well. Now that she was engaged to Herbert Carruthers—soon to become his wife—propriety, and perhaps inclination as well forbade her to entertain any feeling save that of mere friendship towards the man for whom she had once freely and openly acknowledged her love.

"Carruthers has acquainted me with his good fortune," he said, rather unsteadily, "and I have done my best to congratulate him upon it."

"You allude to the engagement existing between Lord Carruthers and myself, I suppose," she replied, indifferently.

"Yes! what other meaning could my words bear?" he continued, a look of intense, despairing pain crossing his dark face as he spoke. "You have made another man of him already. I could scarcely credit the wonderful change for the better that has taken place in him within such a short space of time. It is an easy matter to recover when you suffer from no actual malady, and the great overmastering desire of your life has been gratified."

"Yes, Lord Carruthers' health is sufficiently

good by this time to exonerate you from any further anxiety regarding it," she replied, with a faint touch of sarcasm. "You will pardon me if I leave you now, Captain Clitheroe! It is time for me to return to the pension!"

"Estella, Miss Raymond, I have a request to make before you go!" said Rupert Clitheroe, with strange passionate earnestness. "I am the last man to whom you might be expected to listen patiently; and yet I cannot rest until I have sought forgiveness from you for the madness—the absolute brutality of which I was guilty towards you on the night of Lady Mildour's ball. Some instinct tells me that you know how to be magnanimous and noble in your bearing towards others, even when they have offended, and grieved you so deeply as I have done myself."

"I am doing my best to consign the incident to which you allude to the limbo of things forgotten," she replied, quietly. "In some cases it is best to have no memory, Captain Clitheroe. Allow me to inform you, however, that I cherish not the slightest ill-feeling towards you by reason of what occurred on the night in question."

"It is kind and generous of you to say this," he continued. "Your conduct in this matter renders my own doubly base by force of contrast. And now I have something to tell you in order to render my own humiliation complete. Estella, I was playing with edged tools when I endeavoured to inflict a wound upon you by coldly reflecting the great love placed within my reach. The weapon used has recoiled upon me, as well it might, and I shall carry its scars to the grave!"

"I do not understand you!" she replied, coldly, with averted face.

"I have learned to love you!" he said, desperately—the barrier of reserve and self-control being swept away before the strong tidal wave of passion and remorse; "and this love was sleeping in my heart at the time, when, like a mad fool, I put away with my own hand the happiness to possess which I would now freely give half my remaining years. Carruthers' good news, the fact of knowing that you were engaged to another man, first revealed the truth to which I have so long been blind in all its intensity. Oh! Estella, my love, my love! I have, indeed, suffered double for this my sin against you!"

"It is rather late in the day for such a confession to be made," Estella rejoined in a low voice, while she kept her face steadily turned away from him in the direction of the gleaming, silvery cascade.

"It might have been better, under the circumstances, for you to maintain silence upon such a painful subject."

Rupert Clitheroe's bronzed handsome face flashed crimson as these words fell upon his ear.

"Do not think so ill of me," he said proudly, "as to imagine that I wish to shake the allegiance you owe to Carruthers by pleading my own cause when you have but recently promised to become his wife! That would be a depth of meanness and dishonour to which I have not yet descended. I am less than nothing to you now; and if I cannot accept my fate with much resignation, at least I am ready to acknowledge that I deserve it since—such as it is—I have brought it on myself. But I felt that injustice to you, the real results of my attempt at refusal should be disclosed, in order that you might learn what a sorry triumph I had to boast of. Estella, before I go, will you try to say something kindly and forgiving to me, that I may remember it in the long, lonely years to come? After to-night, remember, we shall meet as mere acquaintances, and the past must be buried in oblivion."

As he ceased speaking, Estella turned round and faced him fairly at last. Her beautiful eyes were gleaming with unshed tears, but a faint smile played on her lips.

She would have been either more or less than woman had she failed to experience the least exultation or delight on receiving an avowal of love from the man who, but a little while ago,

had filled her with shame by refusing to avail himself of the love, deep, strong, and lasting, that she had entertained for him. She enjoyed her victory, although it was accompanied by a feeling of pain and regret. Being a generous conqueror, however, she refrained from any open exultation over her victim.

"Rupert," she said gently, placing a slender hand upon his sleeve as she spoke. "I ought not to have reproached you for trying to effect a better understanding between us. I am glad now that you have done so, although it is too late for our lives to be altered by it. We have both behaved foolishly, and now we must bear the consequences of our folly, as best we may. It will help me when I am weary to think that I really succeeded in winning your love, though, and that you were brave enough to confess your defeat. As for you, I will be frank enough to say that my love—not being transferable at will—is still in your keeping, and wherever you go, Rupert, you will carry with you the knowledge that Estella Raymond's heart is faithful and constant to its first and only passion. When I say this I do Herbert Carruthers no wrong; for, ere I consented to become his wife, I told him plainly that I had no love to offer him, only respect and liking, and he accepted me upon my own terms."

"He was not likely to do anything else," replied Rupert, moodily. "Estella, what was the motive that induced you to engage yourself to Carruthers?"

"In the first instance, I was feeling unhappy and remorseful," she said, with a sob in her voice, and a look of intense weariness in her pale, lovely face.

"Your reproachful words have caused me to regard myself from a fresh point of view as a cruel heartless coquette. I don't really think that I was ever guilty of deliberate, intentional cruelty in those bygone days, Rupert; but I was fond of admiration and homage, and too thoughtless to care much about the pain of a refusal when I gave it. Your words set me thinking, and the pain I had endured myself, for the first time, probably helped to increase the feeling of remorse for the pain I had given. A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind, you know."

"Go on," he said gently, as she paused for a moment, and tried hard to keep back the tears that would come in spite of all her efforts to check them.

"While that remorse was still strong upon me," she continued, "we went abroad. Quite by accident, as some people would say, we fell in with the Carruthers. For the second time Herbert Carruthers asked me to be his wife, and—I anxious to show that I had done something better with my own life, that I had not used it merely to destroy a far nobler one—consented."

"But if you had known what you are to me," he cried, passionately, "in that case, would you still have accepted him?"

"I could not have done so," she replied, in a broken voice, "it would have been impossible. Dear, if you could only have come a little earlier. I wonder how or why it is," she continued, "that the things we most desire frequently come to us when we are unable to hold out our hands to accept them."

"Heaven only knows how I am to live through the long dreary years without you, my darling," said Rupert Clitheroe, as he took her unresisting hand in both his own. "Estella, death itself could hardly be more bitter than this final parting. Oh, my love, must it be? Is there no power of appeal?"

"Ask yourself," she replied, gently, "and your own fine sense of honour will quickly say no. We shall, at least, have the memory of this short, sweet hour to brighten our existence, and the long grey path of duty upon which we are both entering will come to an end in time like all things earthly. I am the stronger of the two just at present, able to cheer and encourage you. Once more, Rupert, my love, goodbye, and Heaven bless you."

She pressed her lips lightly to his forehead, sending an electric thrill through his whole

being as she did so; and then, crossing the little bridge with hasty footsteps, not daring to glance back lest her courage should suddenly fail her, Estella Raymond vanished from sight in the fragrant darkness.

One hour later, Rupert Clitheroe made his way back to the hotel. Lady Carruthers sat reading by the shaded lamp. Norah, at the piano was delighting Archie Campbell, by singing song after song to him, in her sweet powerful soprano, while Herbert was conspicuous only by his absence from the family circle.

"Romeo has gone to see Juliet," said Norah, mischievously, as Rupert Clitheroe entered the room. "He cannot bear to be long away from her, you know. If I were Juliet I should vote him an intolerable nuisance for coming so often."

And, as she uttered these careless words a feeling of deep commiseration for the woman he loved and the woman who loved him, gathered slowly on Rupert Clitheroe's breast. The world was, indeed, terribly out of joint for them both, when he was compelled to leave her, while another man, for whom, comparatively speaking, she cared nothing, sped on with his now unwelcome wooing.

Lord Carruthers' wedding took place in the following November; and Rupert, as his familiar friend, was compelled to be present at the ceremony. He acted as best man to the unconscious cause of all his trouble, and he stood by, apparently unmoved, while the solemn words were spoken that divided Estella from him, and erected a barrier between them that death alone could level.

It was the old tale of masks and faces for them both.

Estella's pure pale loveliness had never shown to better advantage than when dressed in the conventional white silk and orange blossoms. She stood at the altar, and accepted Herbert Carruthers "for better for worse." She was very calm, very self-possessed, but only once at the moment of departure did she permit her eyes to meet those of Rupert Clitheroe.

The expression of pain and suffering contained in their liquid depths fairly startled him, and caused him for awhile to forget his own sorrow in thinking of hers.

A torrent of good-byes, good wishes and laughter, a rustle of silken-scented garments, a shower of rice and old satin slippers, and the newly-married pair were off.

As Rupert Clitheroe stood there, mechanically twisting a bruised flower between his fingers, until the carriage disappeared from view, he told himself that the sweetest, saddest chapter in his life's history had come to a close.

CHAPTER VII.

RUPERT CLITHEROE'S existence could boast of little active pleasure or interest during the long, dull, eventless months that followed his friend's marriage. Society had, to a great extent, lost its charm for him; and the monotonous routine of military duty was not qualified to assist him in forgetting the past and the painful memories it contained.

More than once he was compelled to accept Lord Carruthers' pressing invitation, and spend a few days or weeks with the newly-married pair at Castle Carruthers. He dreaded these visits; and he always felt extremely thankful when they were over, since they only served to revive the old pain, and to bring the happiness he had lost, and which had passed into the life of another man, immediately under his notice.

But the invitations could not always be declined, and Rupert Clitheroe from time to time found himself under the same roof with Estella, Lady Carruthers, as one of the many guests that she loved to gather round her. She always gave him a frank, cordial welcome, but no allusion to the past was ever permitted to cross her lips when by chance they happened to be alone.

A mutual understanding existed between them upon this subject, and neither attempted to infringe the rule of silence that both had accepted long ago on a moonlight night, with

the tall dark pines and the mountains for their only witnesses.

Herbert Carruthers was justly proud of his beautiful wife, and marriage seemed only to increase the strong all-absorbing passion he had from the first entertained for her. If Estella could not give him any ardent love in return for all the devotion he lavished upon her, she was at least wonderfully gentle and sympathetic, ready in all things to help him, or to fall in with his plans, until he began to hope that he had really succeeded in winning her heart at last—since the one unalterable love-passion in it that rendered such a thing impossible was unknown to him.

She ruled his household and dispensed hospitality on a large scale with queenly grace, and a matured matronly air that added a quaint charm to her fresh young loveliness.

The tenants and the village people were never tired of singing her praises, for Estella was radical enough to regard them all as human beings, only separated from herself by certain questions of education and fortune. She could afford to be courteous to all men; and when she went among her husband's people on an errand of business or pleasure, a warm welcome always awaited her from the man who farmed the most land, to gaffers and goodies who dearly loved to relate their respective ailments, and to receive substantial sympathy in return.

Rupert Clitheroe, looking on quietly at her busy, useful life, recognizing the importance of the social position that she filled so well, could but admire the moral courage that had enabled her to face her sorrow bravely and make the best of existence, even when the great stimulus of love had been withdrawn.

At the same time, a great wave of useless regret would sweep over him with the reflection that, but for his own blind mistaken decision, this fair stately woman, who was atoning so nobly for her faults in the past, might have been his wife.

"At any rate, I have been true to Carruthers; and without my intercession on his behalf, he might not have gained his present happiness," he told himself occasionally, although the fact of his self-sacrifice brought him little consolation.

It is a different matter to rejoice when another person's happiness has been established upon the crumbling ruins of your own.

In less than a year from the time of her brother's marriage Norah Carruthers became Archie Campbell's wife.

Briefs were beginning to fall in at last, and the young barrister determined to marry, more on the strength of what he hoped to obtain than on what he already possessed. Lady Carruthers gave a somewhat unwilling consent to the match, since Norah's heart was entirely set upon it; and the young couple commenced life in a *bijou* residence which, if it could boast of little in the shape of comfort or convenience, was yet situated in a very fashionable locality.

Lord Carruthers gave his sister a cheque for ten thousand pounds upon her wedding-day, as his contribution towards housekeeping; while Rupert Clitheroe, for the second time in his life, was called upon to act as best man to a friend.

"Come, Clitheroe, when are you going to take the leading part in a matrimonial drama of your own construction?" Herbert Carruthers inquired jestingly at the *réception* little breakfast that followed the marriage ceremony. "You have been 'walking-gentleman' long enough; we shall all be most happy to support you in your new character."

"You are very kind," he replied, with a smile. "I'm afraid, though, that the rôle of bridegroom would be quite out of my line. I am a confirmed old bachelor."

When the war at the Cape first broke out, Rupert heard, with a feeling of profound relief, that the regiment into which he had exchanged was to embark at once for the scene of action. He was fast growing weary of a life that contained no definite aim or motive, and the prospect of active service thus held out to him came like a

brisk wind to freshen and invigorate his tired faculties.

The voyage out was a speedy and prosperous one. After remaining in a state of inactivity for a week or two the regiment received orders to proceed to the front. There plenty of warm work awaited the men in their frequent combats with the fierce dark-skinned warriors, whose strength and courage in many cases equalled their own.

Captain Clitheroe distinguished himself on several occasions by the cool daring and the clever tactics displayed when fighting against terrible odds. He was always ready to lead a forlorn hope, or to stand in any breach, no matter how great the danger to life and limb, and his men gloried in him as a veritable fire-eater. They could not tell what a slight value their captain placed upon the life that he so frequently imperilled.

For a while he emerged from every conflict unscathed, and his brother officers laughingly pronounced him to be as invulnerable to injury as Achilles. But, during an unexpected attack, when the British were taken somewhat at a disadvantage, he received several severe wounds from an assegai.

Hemmed in by countless Zulus, he saw the dusky arm upraised to strike; he felt the shock of the murderous weapon as it descended, and then the world became a blank to him as he fell heavily to the ground.

When he recovered consciousness he was in hospital with kindly anxious faces—very different to those he had last looked at—bending over him.

"Still in the land of the living, you see, Captain Clitheroe," said the doctor, cheerily, as Rupert opened his eyes and glanced wearily around him. "Those black brutes had well nigh made an end of you before the men could get near enough to rescue you from their clutches, however. They've cut you about badly, but none of the wounds are likely to prove dangerous; and when we've pulled you round again you'll be able to take your revenge on them."

"I almost wish they had done their work in better style, and not left it half finished!" he said, with a bitter smile, as he turned his face away from the light.

Numbers of men whose wives and mothers and children are even now praying and longing for the safe return of their dear ones had fallen on the battle field, while he, the dreary solitary man for whom life had no charms, still survived. Truly the ways of Heaven are past all finding out!

His recovery was a slow, tedious affair, and peace had been declared before he was discharged from the hospital as convalescent. Sympathetic letters had reached him both from his cousin, Mrs. Sinclair, and Herbert Carruthers soon after his injuries had been received.

Carruthers' letter was accompanied by a volume of poems that had taken the reading world by storm, and established the reputation of their writer upon a solid foundation. Full of fire and force and tenderness, embodying in happily chosen words the vague unspoken thoughts and sympathies of the mind, they had been eagerly read and universally applauded.

As Rupert Clitheroe perused them, he could here and there trace the signs of a woman's influence, and delicate, helpful suggestions, and he knew that, but for Estella, Herbert Carruthers might not have been able to write the work that would serve to keep his name alive in the years to come.

In spite of his friend's oft-repeated request that he would return to England on becoming convalescent, and take up his abode with the family party at Castle Carruthers, Rupert Clitheroe delayed his departure from time to time, and appeared in no hurry to be invalided home. He shrank from another meeting with Estella, and there were no near ties in his case to make the return voyage a thing eagerly to be desired.

Something occurred at length to render his return absolutely necessary, however. An old friend of his father, who had never before taken

any notice of him, or presented him with anything beyond a silver mug in the days of infancy, died and left to the young officer, whose valorous conduct had reached his ears shortly before death, a small estate capable of producing a little over a thousand a year.

There were papers to be signed and various legal formalities to be gone through before the estate really passed into his hands, and he took his passage in the next homeward-bound steamer with a feeling of newly-awakened pleasure and interest in life that he could hardly account for.

On his arrival in town he went at once to Dr. Sinclair's house. That gentleman and his wife received their guest with every token of genuine pleasure and satisfaction at his return.

Mrs. Sinclair especially revelled in the idea that a cousin who had gained the Victoria Cross, and whose bravery had been extolled throughout the length and breadth of the land, would be a splendid object to admire and display to the admiring gaze of society, while she herself would shine with reflected lustre.

She welcomed Rupert warmly, but there was a strange, subdued expression on her face, and something of awe and mystery in her manner, that he failed to understand.

"I must let Carruthers know that I am at home again," he remarked after dinner, when Mrs. Sinclair had established him comfortably upon the sofa, in spite of his protests against being treated as an invalid any longer.

"Dear old fellow, as soon as I feel a little stronger I must go down to the Castle. I shouldn't wonder, though, if he came upon purpose to see me, when once he knows of my arrival."

"Rupert," began Mrs. Sinclair solemnly, "you must prepare yourself to hear some very bad news respecting Lord Carruthers. I cannot keep you in ignorance any longer, although the shock, when you know all, cannot fail to be a severe one, since you were always such staunch friends."

"Bad news!" he repeated, quickly. "Good heavens! What do you mean? What has happened? Tell me at once, Eunice; I hate to be kept in suspense."

"Lord Carruthers died suddenly on the day before yesterday of heart disease," continued Mrs. Sinclair. "It took them all by surprise; they did not even know that his heart was affected. It is very sad, but I hope you will not let it make you ill again, dear Rupert. Oh, I wish I had not told you."

For, covering his face with his hands, Rupert Clitheroe lay back among the cushions and sobbed like a child. Herbert Carruthers had been his only friend; he had been loyal to him, in spite of great temptation, and now death had severed their friendship without permitting any farewell to take place between them before-hand.

Mrs. Sinclair crept softly from the room, and wisely left him alone for awhile. The news of Lord Carruthers' death had given him a terrible shock, and at first he thought, save of regret for the dead, filled his mind.

Then, like a flash of lightning, the fact of Estella's freedom burst upon him, and overwhelmed him with a sensation of mingled hope and despair.

He shrank from this knowledge, and the instinctive joy it produced as from something wrong and unnatural; but, strive as he would, he could not banish it entirely.

He was not sufficiently well to attend the funeral, but a letter, breathing heart-felt sympathy for her great bereavement, reached the Dowager Lady Carruthers from the friend of her lost son. To Estella Rupert felt that, under the circumstances, he had no right to address any formal consolation.

Castle Carruthers went to a distant relation, since Herbert had died childless. Estella and her mother-in-law went to live at the dower house, and their income became comparatively a small one. Rupert Clitheroe paid a visit to them there on his recovery. The loss of her son had greatly undermined the health and spirits of the Dowager.

She clung to Estella for help and comfort as if she had been her own daughter, and Estella's devotion to the feeble, querulous woman was pleasant to behold.

Estella's manner towards her old lover was frank and kindly, but there was a depth of quiet reserve in it that prevented him from alluding to the past, she breathing a word of love until she gave him permission to do so.

At the end of two years old Lady Carruthers died, and Estella, released from the charge she had so generously undertaken, felt lonely and sad. She had no near relatives with whom she cared to take up her abode, and she could not go on living at the dower house quite by herself. Someone else had evidently been considering the subject as well, for ere she had formed any plans for the future she received a visit from a gentleman who now rejoiced in the title of Major Clitheroe.

The coldness of his reception pained and mortified him not a little; it was like a dash of cold water thrown on his red-hot earnestness.

"Have you formed any plans for the future?" he inquired boldly, after some chill, commonplace remarks had passed between them. "You cannot remain here any longer, Estella."

"Oh, I shall manage very well," she replied, carelessly, but with a quiver of pain in her voice that he was quick to detect. "Your own plans must be of paramount importance just now, since you are about to be married."

"Married!" he repeated in a tone of astonishment, "pray who supplied you with such valuable information?"

"Old Lady Dampier," said Estella, with downcast eyes.

"Lady Dampier is an old scandal-monger," he replied, with a mischievous ring in his deep voice. "Her report is without any foundation."

At the same time, I do really entertain some thoughts of getting married.

"When it is all settled you must allow me to congratulate you," Estella remarked, coldly. "How can it be settled until I know whether the woman I love will consent to marry me?"

he said, earnestly. "Estella, it is for you to say whether I am to remain a bachelor all my life or no."

"You are a very Jesuit for craftiness," she replied, with a blush and a tremulous laugh; "but I am not going to risk a second refusal, sir, by meeting you half way."

"In that case I shall infer that silence gives consent," he said, as he drew her gently towards him and kissed her fair face again, and again in his great joy.

"Oh, Estella, my love, you have made me very happy! Our paths in life, so long separate, have at last merged into one; and together we will tread that path, without any shadow of misunderstanding to lead us astray unto the end."

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

It takes a sharp man to do much with a dull market.

The greengrocer is one who trusts the new family in the next block.

A newspaper, recording the fall of a person into the river, says: "It is a wonder he escaped with his life." Prentice says: "Wouldn't it have been a still greater wonder if he had escaped without it?"

When the editor proposed and was accepted, he said to his sweetheart: "I would be glad if you would give me a kiss;" then, observing her blush, he added, "not necessarily for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith." She could not resist that.

"I have been married now," boasted a proxy old fellow, "more than thirty years, and have never given my wife a cross word." "That's because you never dared, uncle," said a little nephew who lived with them. "If you had, auntie would have made you jump."

PATENT medicines are now made that will cure everything but hams.

A melancholy case of suicide: A naughty little boy having been threatened with a whipping, hung his head.

He was making a will and they were talking of literature. "The Pilgrim's Progress," she remarked, "always seemed to me painful. Of course you are familiar with Bunyan?" He said he had one on each foot, and they bothered him a good deal.

A California man choked himself to death with a tape measure. The coroner's verdict was that he died by inches.

An extraordinary thing in ladies' bonnets—an unpowdered face.

It is asserted that no weather prophet was ever struck. Old Sol has a little self-respect left.

It was at the close of the wedding breakfast. One of the guests arose, and glass in hand, said: "I drink to the health of the bridegroom. May he see many days like this." The intention was good, but the bride looked as if something had displeased her.

A deacon gave notice at a prayer-meeting of a church meeting to be held immediately after, and unconsciously added: "There is no objection to the female brethren remaining."

"What is this man charged with?" asked the judge. "Well, if your honour will but look at him," said the matter-of-fact police officer, "you will find him well charged with whisky."

Said Edith to her doll: "There, don't answer me back! You mustn't be hasty, no matter how hateful I am; you must remember I am your mother!"

"Ma," called the facetious small boy. "Well, dear?" "I'm only one, ain't I?" "Yes, love." "Then if I eat this green apple I'll be two, won't I?" "How is that, dear?" "Why, it'll double me up."

She had been praising her sweetheart, and capped the climax with, "And then how soft his hair is!" "Yes," said her ill-natured brother, "and what a soft place it grows in!"

COOKED LEECHES.—"Well, madam, how's your husband to-day?" "Why, doctor, he's no better. Did you get the leeches?" "Yes, but he only took three of them raw—I had to fry the rest."

PRAYING FOR COURAGE.—During a big thunder shower, little Willie, who slept upstairs alone, got scared and called his mother, who came up and asked him what he was frightened about. Will admitted that the thunder was a little too much for a youngster who slept alone. "Well, if you are afraid," said his mother, "you should pray for courage." "Well, all right," said Willie, an idea coming into his head, "suppose you stay up here and pray, while I go downstairs and sleep with pa. She didn't say."

A HEEFMEET INDEED.

Mr girl! I shall never forget her. None of your millinery contrivances who adorn the outside of cup and plate, while within all is artificial mystery and steel springs and destroyers of vacuum. No, sir, she was a seamless self-raker and binder, and I loved her on the instalment plan; that is, I was there tri-weekly. I never kissed her by day, because of a wart on her nose, nor at night, because of bashfulness. We sat one Sunday night alone in the kitchen. The idea of irritating her cheek with a kiss pained me, as I sat with both feet under my chair. Suddenly she remarked, "Dearest, do you know there is an old saying that there's never any kisin' in a room where there's cobwebs?"

"Now!" I gasped, as the cold sweat oozed out of my brow. "Well, there is, but there is no cobwebs hyar." I made one blid plunge, and—after that—no cobwebs in ours.

SOCIETY.

The first arrangements with regard to the marriage of the Princess Victoria of Hesse have been altered. It is now stated that her marriage will take place in Darmstadt, and not before next February.

The Emperor and Empress of Russia intend to pass the winter at Gatchina. The Imperial residence at St. Petersburg will in future be in the Anitschkoff Palace. The Winter Palace will not again, according to present arrangements, be used as a residence until the Czarevitch comes of age, when it will be placed at his disposal.

A BAZAAR in aid of the restoration fund of Hawkesbury Church was held in the orangery at Badminton House, the residence of the Duke of Beaufort. The Duchess, who was to have held a stall, was unfortunately absent at Homburg, where she was attending the sick-bed of her daughter, the Marchioness of Waterford, now happily convalescent. Her grace, however, sent for sale some fancy tables, exquisitely painted by herself. Lady Emily Kingscote (the Duchess's sister) presided over a tea and coffee stall, while the Duke's half-sister, Lady Georgina Courington, had the flower and fruit stall under her charge. As may be imagined, success crowned the efforts of the benevolent instigators of the fête.

A WEDDING took place recently at the early hour of 7.30 A.M., at St. Stephen's, Guernsey, between the eldest daughter of Colonel and Mrs. Bell and Lieutenant Dacre Lacy, R.N. The bride was attired in a dress of rich ivory satin trimmed with silk embroidery; and over the orthodox wreath of orange blossoms was a Brussels net veil caught up and fastened on the shoulder with encharis lilies. The six bridesmaids wore dresses of pale blue nun's veiling trimmed with cream lace, white Princess bonnets trimmed with dark blue velvet, and aigrettes to match the dresses.

ANOTHER fashionable wedding was that between Miss Critchley and Captain Montagu, of the 21st Hussars, on the 12th ult. The bride wore a lovely dress of cream satin, richly trimmed with Spanish lace, the long train being bordered with marabout feathers; her lace veil was fastened with four handsome diamond stars.

THE workmen are busy in Kensington Palace preparing the residence for the Marquis of Lorne and the Princess Louise. The Duchess of Teek was personally as well known in the Court suburb that her successor will have hard work to rival her in popularity. The marquis will find his London residence pleasantly near his father's lodge on Camden Hill. It is to be hoped that under the new regime the garden in front of the Palace, that is, on the south front, will be as well stocked and cared for. The taste of the Princess who has left was well known, and every season she made a change, and every change was an improvement.

Red heels to ladies' boots are coming in again. When heels are at their highest fashion takes to colouring them, lest perchance their stilted perfections should pass unnoticed. When pink stockings were in vogue Charles Lamb, then in his salad days, described modesty taking her flight from earth, and being last visible to mortals by the "track of her glowing instep." But now he might say that modesty has taken to her heels, and that the latter blush as they vanish.

SWALLOWS are the fashionable emblems with Parisians just now for ornamenting travelling costumes and toilettes for watering-places. They are embroidered or painted on dresses and buttons, are imitated for dainty articles of jewellery, while the real birds stuffed may be seen in groups of three nesting in the gauze trimmings of large straw hats.

STATISTICS.

THE total population of the United States and Territories in 1880 was 50,155,783. This number includes 105,465 Chinese, 146 Japanese, and 66,407 Indians.

THE POPULATION OF EGYPT.—By the recent census the total population of Egypt is 6,798,200, very equally divided as far as sex, the men numbering 3,293,993, and the women 3,504,352. The population of the most important towns is thus given:—Cairo, 368,108; Alexandria and suburbs, 208,775; Port Said, 16,560; Suez, 10,913; Tanta, 99,725; Damietta, 84,046; Rosetta, 16,571; Mansourah, 26,784; Zagazig, 19,046. Although strict accuracy is not guaranteed by the authorities, it is believed that this census is a nearer approach to correctness than has previously ever been the case.

GEMS.

It is easy to love our fellow-men. Do good to them, and you will be sure to love them.

ONE of life's hardest lessons from the cradle to the grave is waiting. We send out our ships, but cannot patiently wait their return.

A VERY considerable share of the disease and deaths of our race are the natural effects of sin or wrong-doing.

THE man who lives in vain lives worse than in vain. He who lives to no purpose lives to a bad purpose.

THE bosom of a bad man is a desert, and the passions and vices are its tigers, and hyenas, and serpents.

THE mind is like a trunk; if well packed, it will hold almost everything; if ill packed, next to nothing.

MODESTY is the appendage of sobriety, and is to chastity, to temperance, and to humility, as the fringes are to a garment.

THE human mind is like the ground, which acquires a quality according to the pains bestowed on its cultivation.

WHEN the sun of virtue is set, the blush of shame is the twilight. When that dies, all is darkness.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LEMON JELLY.—Pour a pint of cold water over three-quarters of a box of gelatine; cut into it the thin yellow peel of three lemons, and let it stand one hour. Then pour over it a quart of boiling water; add the juice of seven or eight large lemons and about three cupfuls of loaf sugar (it is better to add sugar to taste). Stir well until the sugar is dissolved, then strain and mould.

APPLE PRESERVE.—Peel and core two dozen apples, and place them in a jar with three pounds of powdered loaf-sugar, and one-quarter pound of ground ginger, distributed in layers. Let them remain two whole days, and during half that time let one-quarter of a pound of bruised ginger infuse in a pint of boiling water; strain and boil the liquor with the apples for about an hour, skim and take off the fire when quite clear.

PICKLED BEETS.—Boil your beets till tender, but not quite soft. To four large beets boil three eggs hard, removing the shells; when the beets are done, take off the skin by laying them for a few minutes in cold water and then stripping it off; slice them a quarter of an inch thick, put the eggs at the bottom, and then put in the beets with a little salt. Pour on cold vinegar enough to cover them. The eggs imbibe the colour of the beets, and look beautiful on the table.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Two white Cashmere goats have just been sent from the Royal herd in Windsor Great Park to the Royal Welsh Fusiliers. That regiment is always accompanied by a goat as a pet.

A CURIOUS wooden boiler has been made by an inventive genius of New Jersey, who has built a steamer to contain it. The boiler is made of a new ale cask, and is said to be capable of standing a pressure of 200 pounds to the square inch, having been already satisfactorily tested at forty pound pressure. It is fitted with flues, but the fire, instead of being under, is above, the draught being supplied by a tube from beneath.

THE hull of a smuggling vessel, several centuries old, has been found fixed in the mud in the mouth of the river Stour, near Sandwich. The size of the lugger is about forty tons, and she is supposed to have been sunk by a shot from some Government vessel, as a 14 lb. ball lies embedded in the timbers of her hull. Other contents were several stone jars of antique shape, and packages of decayed and mouldy tobacco. One jar was so securely sealed up that it still contains some strong-smelling liquor.

MAMMOTH and Rhinoceros bones have been discovered in a cave at the back of the Flynnn Banno, Flintshire, by Dr. Hicks. The cave is a water-worn hollow in the limestone rock. On being closely inspected a floor of stalagmite was disclosed covered by a few inches of soil. Beneath this several pieces of bone were found. Further investigation showed another floor some distance below the first, and resting upon gravel which had drifted and covered the original bottom. The cave is said to be similar to the celebrated Cefn bone caves.

SELFISHNESS is the one great foe to a happy home. If one could overthrow this, all else would fall into order and harmony. When men leave off seeking for enjoyment and complaining because people and circumstances do not afford it; and aim rather at bestowing it upon those for whom they are bound in the holiest of ties, they will have cut at the root of their domestic troubles. With this spirit, outward misfortunes will be bravely borne, outward joys will be doubly blessed.

THE OFFICE of PUBLIC EXECUTIONER.—Upwards of 1,200 applications have been received for the post of executioner vacated by the death of Marwood. They have been forwarded from the Home Office and elsewhere to the Sheriffs of London and Middlesex, who are now engaged in considering and sifting them so as to have a fitting man at hand to carry out the sentence of the law in case of need. The Sheriffs wish it to be particularly known that to reply to so large a number of applications is impracticable, but that original testimonials will, in all cases in which such have been sent, be returned in due course.

A NEW form of hansom is seen in the London streets, and surely not before it is needed. The old "growlers" are falling into disuse, and no fresh ones are being built, and what are ladies to do who have only the hansom to fall back upon? For them the difficulties of getting in gracefully have been increased by the partial adoption of crinolines, and it seems as if crinolines was to get larger, and not smaller. The milliners won't give in, and so the cab-builders have to come round. The result has been a new hansom. The wheels are smaller, the doors are at the side, the seats are more comfortable, the accommodation is ampler. Three "fares" can be accommodated simultaneously without one of them acting as an arm-chair for the other. There was a small issue of this new edition of the London cab put forth at the beginning of last week. It was tentative, but has been so successful that we shall see the new species in full fashion by the end of next month. The reform comes not before it was needed.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

R. Y. D.—Not unless they can prove you are of sufficient ability to do so.

T. H. B.—They might stop the doctor's carriage, but not, we should think, the mail cart.

R. W. J.—The 28th of February, 1833, fell on a Saturday.

N. H.—Quite proper. Of course the lady would not marry again till her period of mourning had expired.

P. D. F.—Havannah is the capital of Cuba, famous for its cigars.

R. S. T.—A nice-looking young lady of whom, so far as looks are concerned, any man might be proud.

M. N.—There were terrible floods at Toulouse, in France, in 1875.

S. D.—Shakespeare is the author of the line, "Conscience does make cowards of us all."

ANXIOUS.—The property can only be transferred by deed, for the preparation of which the purchaser has to pay.

D. W.—An insect exhibition was held in Paris in the Tuilleries Gardens in September, 1874, but whether it was successful we do not know.

D. M. J.—1. A young lady should not encourage attentions if the gentleman is at all distasteful to her. 2. Mary means "bitter," Grace "favour."

W. J. F.—The 4th of August is now fixed by Act of Parliament as the date of the commencement of the oyster season.

BILLY BUTTONS.—Fifty thousand pounds sterling in gold would weigh just about eight hundred pounds avoirdupois.

MINNIE.—You should always defend the absent person who is being spoken of, as far as truth and justice permit.

ALICE.—It is not proper for a young lady to call a gentleman with whom she is but slightly acquainted by his first name.

TOM F.—A letter of recommendation should be written in a plain hand, in as few words as can be used to express the idea distinctly.

E. R.—1. Yellow and black or red and black would be becoming colours for the style of beauty you picture. 2. It is difficult to form an opinion from a written description.

S. B.—The question may now be fairly tried by ratemakers as to whether they are to pay their water rate on the gross rental or rateable value. The House of Lords has decided that the latter is the proper basis of calculation.

HARRY R.—If there is no premium an apprentice's indentures require a half-crown stamp. If there be a premium then for every £5 or fractional part thereof five shillings.

A. P. T.—The present style of envelope came into general use soon after the establishment of the penny post in 1840, though they had been known before, and are mentioned by Swift in 1735.

J. G.—A black dye for cloth may be made as follows: Impregnate the material well with a mordant of acetate of iron, and then boil in a decoction of madder and logwood.

BEK.—So few parents would wish to give their children unhappy names that we do not think any philosopher could or would claim much credit for advising them to do the reverse.

E. F.—When a lady meets a gentleman whom she has only met a few times, or with whom she has had but a short acquaintance, she should merely bow to him; but not at all unless she has been formally introduced.

CURIOUS FRED.—The *Alaska* has made the quickest passages between New York and Queenstown, having made the eastward trip in 6 days, 18 hours, 37 minutes, and the westward in 6 days, 21 hours, 40 minutes.

B. F. B.—We do not remember any instance of a wife signalling her affection for her husband in the way you describe, and it is hard to conceive of the state of feelings which could induce such an act.

W. J. T.—A marriage entered into under the name by which you have been known is perfectly binding, whether that name was given to you by any legal ceremony or not. The only important point is to identify the persons.

C. P.—As your wife and the girl both seem to prefer that you should not accompany the latter to school, it would be best for you to respect their wishes in the matter. A good woman's instincts in such affairs should not be disregarded.

JESSE.—There is no royal road to excellence in music. The first six months at the piano must be more or less drudgery, and it is of the highest importance that the hand should be properly formed, for the due execution of the various difficulties. Unless properly taught at first a young lady is likely to have to unlearn a good deal afterwards.

WILD WILL.—There is a great deal of use in the rules of etiquette. They often protect innocent, inexperienced girls from the acquaintance of objectionable men; they

sometimes protect quiet and honest people against the intrusion of undesirable acquaintances, and perform many other uses. In the case you mention you should find someone to introduce you to the young ladies, and then you could tell by their manner whether they cared for your acquaintance or not.

C. B. S.—The lines you refer to are by William Congreve, and read as follows:

"Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned."

They appear in the play of *The Mourning Bride*, act III., scene 8.

A. S. L.—In saluting a married lady accompanied by her husband, or an unmarried lady in company with a gentleman, a gentleman always removes his hat, and her escort also acknowledges the courtesy by lifting his hat, even though he may be a stranger to the other gentleman.

A. L. Z.—The orthodox number of bridesmaids at a wedding was for a long time six, but lately four have been considered sufficient in many fashionable weddings. There is no reason why it should be unlucky to be married on Christmas-day; quite the reverse we should think.

P. B. D.—Your handwriting is amply good enough for copying work, but in order to be successful in doing such work you must learn to write rapidly, regularly, and accurately. You should endeavour to learn shorthand. An intelligent young woman, who is a fair shorthand writer, can often command a good salary.

WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL.

Welcome dear little ones,
Home to the city;
Though, for your health's sweet sake,
More is the pity.
Oh! how you loved the hills,
Valleys, and meadows—
Crickets and ladybirds—
Sunbeams and shadows!

There is a longing look
Yet in your faces—
Scarce can your feet keep time
With the school paces.
Hard still to substitute
Books for the wildwood,
Where Nature professes such
Sweet tasks for childhood.

Now, my dear lad and lass,
Fresh from the mountains,
Valleys and grand old woods,
Orchards and fountains,
While the birds southward fly,
Take up each duty,
Ere summer brings again
Garlands of beauty.

K. M.

ERIC.—We advise you to defer your offer of marriage to the young girl referred to for two years at least. If she is sincerely attached to you she will have no thought of any one else, especially if you keep up your attentions to her. In the meantime there will be opportunities of judging whether you are really suited to each other.

R. D. W.—We cannot understand why you should object so strongly to the hair growing far down on your forehead. A great many young gentlemen who think a great deal too much about their personal appearance, actually "bang" their hair to produce that effect. There is no method by which you could remove a mass of thickly growing hair permanently from the face.

C. M. J.—A lady need not ask a gentleman to go into the house the first time he escorts her home from a place of amusement. Etiquette does not require that she should invite him to call unless she desires him to do so. She will, of course, thank him for the attention, and he may ask permission to call upon her to inquire after her health, and the lady is privileged to grant or refuse his request.

CARILLON.—1. It is decidedly wrong for persons afflicted with consumption to get married, for it is well known that consumption can be transmitted from one generation to another. 2. The lady friend you refer to is doubtless a sincere mourner, and means what she says. Time alone can decide whether it would be well for her to take the step in question. There is nothing compulsory in the matter.

MATTIE M.—It was William the Conqueror who wooed his bride so strangely. Before he became the conqueror of England, and while he was simply the Duke of Normandy, he fell in love with Mathilde, a beautiful and high-born young lady, who rejected his addresses. This made him so angry that, meeting her one day in the street, he seized her and rolled her in the mud. Strange to say, Mathilde from that time took a fancy to him, and soon consented to become his wife.

C. L. V.—The gems symbolic of the months are as follows:—January, the jacinth or hyacinth, symbolising constancy and fidelity; February, the amethyst (peace of mind and sobriety); March, the blood-stone or jasper (courage and success in dangerous undertakings); April, the sapphire and diamond (repentance and innocence); May, the emerald (amours in love); June, the agate (long life and health); July, the carnelian (cure of

evil resulting from forgetfulness); August, the onyx or sardonyx (conjugal happiness); September, the chrysolite (preservation from folly); October, the aquamarine, opal or beryl (hope); November, the topaz (fidelity and friendship); December, the turquoise or ruby (brilliant success). Some authorities give the agate to May, the emerald to June, the carnelian to August, and the onyx to July.

G. B. W.—Perhaps if you should have a frank, affectionate, firm talk with your son, telling him, in substance, just what you have told us, and appeal to his manliness, that the result would be satisfactory. His conduct may be occasioned by mere boyish thoughtlessness, which such a talk as we have suggested would correct.

BESSIE.—We never have heard of a clock made of bread, but as fresh bread can be worked into a paste, which, on drying, is hard enough to make a very good seal, it would be quite possible to cut out the wheels necessary for a simple clock from such material, and very likely it has been done by some person of great misdirected ingenuity.

J. J. W.—It is right for you to be guided by your own conscience and judgment in such a matter, and you should not allow your friends to laugh you out of your convictions of duty. We think that your views are sound. It is no matter if your friends do call you old-fashioned. Modest, sensible, conscientious, old-fashioned girls are in greater demand for wives now than they ever were before.

LAURENCE.—The young lady might certainly have expressed regret. But you should remember that when a girl is invited to a wedding, everything else is trivial in comparison with the importance of such an event. It is never worth while for a young man to work up such an affair as you have described into a grievance, and demand formal explanations and apologies. Young ladies do not see such things in that light at all.

ANNIE.—All law, Jewish, Roman and modern, has considered half-brothers or sisters to be more closely related than first cousins. Kindred or relationship is the connection of persons descended from a common ancestor, and its closeness is reckoned by nearness to that common ancestor. Half-brothers are only one degree, while first cousins are two degrees, from a common ancestor.

GRANDIFLORA.—1. A girl of sixteen of average height and development should weigh from ninety to a hundred pounds. 2. Fair writing, but not neat. 3. For hard corns, take them out with a pair of sharp scissors after having soaked the feet well in hot water; for soft corns a drop of glacial acetic acid, obtainable at any chemist's, should be dropped on them, care being taken not to let the acid touch the surrounding flesh. The best preventive for corns is always to wear easy boots or shoes, and frequently change them.

B. B.—As you and the young lady are not engaged she has a perfect right to exercise her own judgment about going to places of entertainment with you, and you have no right to complain, especially as she can give the excuse that she is going with her own family. It is possible that she or her friends quite wisely think it is just as well not to be seen too much in public with a young man who has not declared his intentions, and if you really love her and hope that someday she will be your wife you had better tell her so at once, and perhaps her scruples against accompanying you to places of amusement may disappear.

C. R. B.—1. No. 2. A cubic foot of iron and a cubic foot of steam at the same temperature would not contain the same amount of heat, and consequently your explanation of their doing so, by different rates of molecular vibration, is quite superfluous. Temperature no more measures the amount of heat in a body than the pressure of a column of water measures the work it can do in falling. The principal factors in determining the amount of heat in a body are its temperature, weight and specific heat. 3. Strips of iron placed as you describe would soon get almost as hot as the steam passing about them, but not quite so hot; while heating they would cool the steam considerably, and even after they were hot, the iron, being a good conductor of heat, would carry some heat to the pipe, make it warmer, and so increase the loss by radiation. Your strips would do further harm by increasing the friction or resistance of the pipe, and so wasting still more heat.

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